

The Decision making and Experiences of Thai Postgraduate Students in the UK: implications for marketing strategies

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Abstract

The increased numbers of players in international higher education means that international students have more choices. This makes universities compete harder in the global market. Institutions in many countries, including the UK, have to adjust themselves in response to students' needs. Although there has been increasing research in relation to higher education institutes, surprisingly little attention has been paid to the in-depth details of which factors influence students' decision-making and how they experience university services.

This thesis aims to analyze UK higher education from Thai perspectives, including both outsiders involved with higher education in Thailand and Thai students' study experiences. To achieve this, the study uses mixed methods research. In particular, elite interviews, nationwide questionnaires and longitudinal interviews are the main research tools used in this study. The research finds that UK higher education has a positive reputation among Thai executives. In terms of marketing UK institutes in Thailand, factor analysis indicates that three appropriate marketing strategies are 'Product and People', 'Promotion' and 'Place'. In terms of students' decision making, the findings show that Thai students often choose to study in the UK because the duration of master's degree course is shorter than those of competitors, thus saving on budgets. A variety of other internal and external factors are also incorporated in the selection of a university. Regarding university service quality, the gap between students' expectations and their nine-month experiences highlights a lack of university performance in factors related to academic service factors, especially library services which show the biggest discrepancy. Drawing together these findings presents implication for higher education marketers and policy makers in relation to understanding its market position, strategies and improving the services it offers.

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List of Acronyms

AEI	Australian Education International
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
IDP	IDP Education Australia
NAFSA	Association of International Educators (Formed as: the National Association of Foreign Student Advisors)
OCSC	Office of the Civil Service Commission, Thailand
OEA	Office of Educational Affairs of the Royal Thai Embassy
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OHEC	Office of the Higher Education Commission
PMI	The Prime Minister's Initiative
UIS	UNESCO Institute for Statistics
UK	The United Kingdom
UKCOSA	The Council for International Education
UKCISA	UK Council for International Student Affairs
US	The United States

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

International education has grown very rapidly over the past three decades. The OECD indicates that the number of international students worldwide has grown from 0.8 million in 1975 to at least 4.1 million in 2010 (OECD, 2012), and there has been an increase of 99 per cent since 2000 (OECD, 2012). This growing number of international students has been forecast to increase from 2.1 million in 2003 to approximately 5.8 million by 2020 (British Council, 2004). English-speaking countries such as the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), Australia and Canada have long dominated the market in exporting international education to students (UIS, 2012a). These countries benefit from overseas money being brought in. The US is the world leader in hosting international students and accounts for 18 per cent of international students from the global market (Chau, 2011).

The UK is the second global leader. The number of international students has risen every year. In 2008-09, approximately 416,000 international students from over 200 different countries enrolled in UK higher education and it is forecast that there will be a demand for 511,000 places by 2020 (British Council, 2009b). The UK government aims to persuade more international students to come to study in the UK. The Prime Minister's Initiative 1 (PMI1) was launched in 1999 to increase the number of international students studying in the UK. The following PMI2, launched in 2006, aimed "to secure the UK's position as a leader in international education and sustain the growth of UK international education delivered in the UK and overseas" (British Council, 2011: i). It also aimed to ensure the quality of the students' experience as well as to increase student satisfaction ratings in the UK (British Council, 2010b). International students bring an economic impact to the UK; for example, they generated approximately £8.5 billion of income in 2008-09 (British Council, 2010a). Through hosting international students from all over the world, the British can benefit from learning from, and exchanging social and cultural perspectives

with, people from different backgrounds. Meanwhile, the UK is able to promote its country and people through international graduates who were educated in the UK. They will have a lasting tie with the country and become ambassadors for Britain when they return home. Information from IDP (2002) forecasts that Asia will represent approximately 70 per cent of the total number of global international students by 2025. Over half of the international student demand is estimated to generate from China and India, who will be key growth drivers by 2025. In the UK, the rates of growth in numbers of international students from China and India are reported to be the first and second highest, respectively (British Council, 2010b).

At present, due to the world economic crisis, new players are coming to the market and focusing on how to obtain money from overseas for their countries. Therefore, English-speaking countries are no longer the only providers of international education and training. Non-English speaking countries have been attempting to persuade world-class universities to set up campuses in their countries since 2000 (Chadee and Naidoo, 2009). This is to enable them to compete with traditional education provider countries in order to attract both local students and international students to regional education hubs. These regional education hubs are in the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Malaysia, Singapore and China. The governments of these countries have tried hard to attract these world-class universities to set up branches in their own countries; for example, the Education Act (1998) launched by the Malaysian Government to permit the establishing of foreign university branch campuses in the country (Mazzarol et al., 2003). China also has a target to increase the number of international students coming to study in China by 500,000 places (BBC, 2011). Information from the *Times Higher Education* (2012b) indicates that there are over 200 university branch campuses worldwide. The US is the leader in this (78 campuses). The UK also has 25 campuses in overseas countries, including the University of Nottingham in China and Malaysia and the University of Manchester in China, Hong Kong and Dubai.

Additionally, partnerships or joint ventures with local education providers are also set up as part of the global education market. Therefore, information from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2009) indicates that although there

has been an increase in the absolute number of international students for both the UK and the US, there were declines in their shares of the world's internationally mobile students between 1999 and 2007.

All these factors support the idea that international students have the benefit of more study choices than ever before. At the same time, their expectations are growing. Under these circumstances, it is very important that the UK understands its market situations and relevant issues, acknowledges changes and deploys appropriate marketing strategies. The above-mentioned issues include acknowledging what international students need and want, how they experience studying in the UK and what marketing strategies work for international students. Answering these questions could help the UK understand its position and enhance its ability to meet the challenge of competition in the global market effectively.

1.2 The Importance of the Thai Market as a Selected Choice

Information from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2009) indicates that the number of Thai students going to study abroad has increased moderately by a fifth from 1999 to 2002. Between 2003 and 2006, the number remained constant at approximately 24,000 students before increasing to 26,018 in 2011 (UIS, 2012b). The US is reported to be the main education destination for Thai students. According to UNESCO's Global Education Digest (2008), approximately 9,000 students chose to study in the US in 2006, while the UK took second place and Australia was third (British Council, 2010c).

The number of Thai students in the UK is presented in Table 1.1. As can be seen, in 2010-11, HESA reported there were 6,500 Thai students in the UK. By 2011-12, the number of Thai students enrolled in UK higher education had increased to 6,800 places, or a 4.6 per cent increase. The growth rate from 2002-03 to 2011-12 was 97.4 per cent within these nine years and this suggests that Thailand represents a good opportunity for UK higher education.

Table 1.1: Number of Thai Students in the UK

Degree	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
First Degree	650	705	710	730	755	765	795	880	955	1,095
Other Undergraduate	195	230	265	230	230	210	235	345	395	295
Master's Degree	1,760	1,940	2,050	2,235	2,450	2,575	2,920	3,590	3,955	4,190
Ph.D.	840	920	950	1,035	1,155	1,210	1,210	1,215	1,195	1,215
Total	3,445	3,795	3,975	4,230	4,590	4,760	5,160	6,030	6,500	6,800
% Growth		10.16	4.7	6.4	8.5	3.7	8.4	16.86	7.8	4.6

Source: HESA (2013)

The table also suggests that the majority of Thai students in the UK enrol in Master's degree courses. Fewer Thai students choose the UK for undergraduate and Ph.D. courses. The British Council (2008: 2) states that there is considerable opportunity for the growth in the postgraduate sector, "which has seen steady growth in one-year taught programmes".

Although the US is the market leader for overseas destinations, the UK still has a good opportunity to compete with the US because of the aftermath of the terrorist attack of September 2001, since when the US has been seen as less safe by international students. Another factor is that the visa application process has become stricter for them (*Independent*, 2008).

Data from the British Council (2010c) and Tarry (2008) indicate that one major reason why Thai students seek overseas education is that they do not see Thai universities as offering excellent postgraduate courses and research degrees. Although the Thai government has attempted to improve the research base in Thai universities, a lack of funding hampers improvements to the postgraduate and research sector. Furthermore, there is a Thai social expectation that students educated overseas will have better knowledge and qualifications than students in Thai universities and therefore better opportunities for promotion at work (Sinlarat et al., 2007 and Tarry, 2008). Tarry (2005 cited in Tarry, 2008: 110) supports the idea that overseas qualification can be a consideration in social mobility or "...increasing their preserving the Thai hierarchy and

increasing their status and ultimately increasing their economic capital” for people in middle-class or working-class families.

The UK is highly regarded among the English-speaking education provider nations in the minds of many Thais. This is because King Rama VI, King Rama VII, the princes of King Rama V, other members of the Thai Royal family, at least four ex-prime ministers of Thailand, hundreds of academics, hundreds of executives and some famous celebrities all graduated from the UK. Therefore, many Thai families seek to send their children to the UK for higher education.

The growing of Thai government scholarships also benefits the UK. Evidence from the Office of the Civil Service Commission (OCSC, 2005) suggests that the UK is the third favourite destination for Thai students sponsored by the Royal Thai Government. Beyond government scholarships, privately-funded scholarships and other government schemes are also available. Scholarship providers include the PTT Public Company Ltd., the Bangkok Bank, the Siam Cement Group and The Golden Jubilee Scholarship (British Council, 2009a). The Golden Jubilee Scholarship aims to produce 20,000 PhD graduates by 2023 in response to a shortage of PhD graduates in Thai universities (Royal Golden Jubilee-Ph.D., 2011).

Last but not least, another important point is the fact that Thailand has never been colonized by a Western power. This gives Thailand different characteristics from neighbouring countries such as Cambodia, Vietnam, Burma and Malaysia, which were once colonized by Great Britain and France (Tarry, 2008). On this point, Tarry (2008) criticized a study by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) into the research factors influencing the destination choices of international students from four Asian countries: Taiwan, China, Indonesia and India. The criticism was that their study failed to address the fact that these countries had been colonized by Western countries for a period of time.

1.3 Research Aims and Objectives

This study aims to investigate UK higher education from Thai perspectives. It includes both outsiders involved in higher education in Thailand and Thai students' experiences of studying in the UK. The aim will be achieved by a thorough investigation of the following objectives.

1. To identify the perception relating to UK higher education among executives in Thailand's higher education
2. To investigate factors relating to students' decision making regarding studying in the UK
3. To investigate the marketing strategies of UK higher education used in Thailand
4. To investigate the role of educational agencies in Thailand and student satisfaction levels
5. To investigate the expectation - experience gap that current Thai students experience in relation to UK higher education

In particular, Objective 1 is a starting point of this study because it aims to elicit general perceptions of UK higher education by interviewing higher education senior management executives in Thailand. It also provides perceptions of higher education in other education exporting countries in comparison to the UK. Objective 2 examines factors that Thai students select to study in the UK and their university. This is achieved through the triangulation between qualitative and quantitative research methods. Objective 3 and 4 examine marketing strategies of UK universities as well as the role of educational agencies in Thailand. In addition, Objective 4 seeks to assess overall level of satisfaction with services from educational agencies. The final objective provides postgraduate students' expectations and their experiences of service quality at a provincial UK university longitudinally. Discrepancies between the two stages were analysed in order to show the service performances of the university (further detailed will be explained in Chapter 3).

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis consists of eight chapters. This first chapter provides a brief introduction to the rationale of the study and an overview of the research objectives. The second chapter is the literature review. It provides the theoretical backbone of the research agenda by reviewing the literature related to higher education marketing, trends in higher education and higher education in UK universities. It explains the concept of service quality, the relationship between satisfaction and service quality and how service quality is measured. This is followed by an examination of the decision-making processes of overseas students and related factors. The history of and important background to foreign education in Thailand are also explained in this chapter in order to present an overview of overseas study among Thai people as well as the social standing connected to it.

A review of the research methodologies used is presented in the third chapter. A presentation of a mixed methods approach, in which both qualitative and quantitative approaches are utilized, is outlined. In particular, in-depth interviewing has been employed in order to interview 9 executives in leading Thai universities and organizations in order to obtain perceptions of UK higher education. Self-administered questionnaires were developed after preliminary interviews with 17 students from four leading universities in UK. Furthermore, to investigate the gap between students' expectations and experiences of service quality, a longitudinal study was employed. Thus, a group of 17 students from a provincial UK university were interviewed regarding their expectations before attending the university. They were re-interviewed after nine months at the university in order to track how their expectations had changed. This chapter later highlights the data collection process, the sampling strategy and how the data were analysed. The final discussion concerns ethical issues in this research.

The four following chapters (chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven) present the results of the research. Chapter Four presents the results of the interviews with Thai executives in leading universities and organizations in order to meet research objective 1. Specifically, the beginning of this chapter highlights the

respondents' profiles, followed by the results concerning their perceptions of UK higher education and UK graduates, which comprise the key point of this chapter.

In Chapter Five, the results of the qualitative research are introduced. Initially, this covers the first phase, in which 17 postgraduate Thai students in a UK university are interviewed. The chapter aims to discover their expectations of service quality before attending the university within six categories, in order to meet objective five of this study. This chapter also presents the qualitative results on students decision-making factors (objective 2) for each choice.

Chapter Six follows on from Chapter Five by presenting the second phase of the qualitative research. This involves interviewing the same students as in the previous chapter and discussing their university experiences. Factors related to how expectations have changed over a period of time are also highlighted. Later in this chapter, an analysis of the discrepancy between two phases is carried out, which is the main purpose of objective five.

Chapter Seven presents the results of the quantitative research. The scope of this chapter is an attempt to present the main results of the quantitative research; that research is designed to answer three of this study's objectives. It also functions to support the decision-making process results in Chapter Five (objective 2). In terms of the marketing strategies of UK universities, it highlights marketing materials that are often used in Thailand. Factor analysis is used to reduce series of attributes of marketing strategies into a presentation of more manageable groups (objective 3). The role of educational agencies and people's levels of satisfaction with them, which come under objective 4 of this research, are also presented in this chapter.

The final chapter is the conclusion of the thesis. It summarizes the main findings and gives recommendations to education marketers and UK universities, as well as outlining the implications of this study. The limitations of this research and suggestions for further research in higher education strategies are also identified.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Each year, more than 4.1 million international students move from their home countries to foreign countries for their education, especially to major English-speaking countries (OECD, 2012). The reasons why these students seek overseas education rather than being educated in their home countries is of interest to many scholars (e.g. Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Cubillo, Sanchez and Cervino, 2006; Tarry, 2008). Knowledge about the pattern of students' decision making relating to their choice of country or institution, as well as about marketing strategies in higher education, is needed by marketers in higher education so that they can take these into consideration when attempting to attract international students. Moreover, students' expectations and perceptions of their university experiences are key issues that are investigated in this thesis.

The purpose of this chapter is to review and analyze the previous literature on higher education and its marketing. Many scholars support the view that research in higher education marketing is incoherent and in the pioneer stage (e.g. Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Nicolescu, 2009; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007). Therefore, much research remains to be carried out. Another aim is to describe the current strategies in marketing higher education in relation to the competitive market.

The chapter begins with the general concept of marketing in higher education. An overview of the growing number of international students in the global market, as well as the benefits of international students to the home country is then given. In particular, the marketing strategies used in the UK and related factors in higher education marketing are presented.

The next section (section 2.3) reviews service quality and student satisfaction. A review of the previous studies in these areas suggests that further study is

needed to fill the gap in this area; for example, students' experiences while at university, especially their non-academic experiences.

Theoretical models of decision making and determinant factors that motivate students' decision making are also presented in the following section. It also discusses push-pull factors, family influences and the significant role of education agencies.

The final section explains the history of the education revolution in Thailand. Without this section, it would not be possible to understand the social rationale for undertaking foreign education. The relationship between British education and Thailand is examined later in this section.

2.2 Higher Education Marketing

2.2.1 Overview of Higher Education Marketing

In recent years, the element of globalization in higher education has become far more widespread and multifaceted. Education is a main export product of the major-English speaking nations: the US, the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2008; Smith and Khawaja, 2011). According to the American Council on Education (2006), the UNESCO Institute of Statistics website states that there were 2.5 million international students studying overseas in 2004. This was 56 per cent more than the total number of international students in 1999. In 2010, over 4.1million international students were reported as being enrolled to study outside their home countries (OECD, 2012).

According to IDP Education Australia (IDP, 2002), it is estimated that international student numbers will increase from 1.8 million in 2000 to 7.2 million by 2025. Asia will represent approximately 70 per cent of the total number of global international students by 2025 as over half of international student demand is estimated to generate from China and India and these countries are thus key growth drivers.

The US have taken the lead in exporting international education since 1999, followed by the UK and Australia, respectively (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003). According to UNESCO Institute for statistics (UIS, 2012a), the US remained the market leader in international education in 2010 as it took 19 per cent of market share, followed by the UK (11 per cent). Germany, France and Australia share similar market share of 8%, 7% and 6% respectively.

2.2.1.1 Benefits of International Education

The beginning of marketing in higher education is unclear. The literature puts forward various reasons why higher education institutions have to market themselves. These reasons include cuts in public budgets and declines in state revenues in the university sector (Marginson, 2004; Naude and Ivy, 1999; Palihawadana and Holmes, 1999; Russell, 2005; Holloway and Holloway, 2005), economic shocks and restructuring (Chadee and Naidoo, 2009), and a decline in numbers of students and resources (Kotler and Fox, 1995).

After a decade of globalization, higher education institutes have realized the benefits of marketing themselves in the global market. The flow of international students impacts on host countries in a variety of ways (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2001). International students can contribute millions of dollars to the host economy, provide employment and improve the trade surplus of the education exporting country (Mazzarol, 1998). Mazzarol (1998) illustrates this by stating that international students in Canada were estimated to contribute around 1.5 billion Canadian dollars and to have created almost 20,000 jobs in 1991. A study by Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada reports that international students contribute over 6.5 billion dollars in tuition fees, accommodation and other expenses, as well as generating more than 80,000 jobs for the Canadian economy in 2008 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2011). For the UK, the evidence suggests that international students are estimated to generate £14 billion for the country (BIS, 2011). In case of the US, NAFSA - Association of International Educators reports that international students and their dependents contribute approximately \$ 22 billion to the US economy during the academic year of 2011-2012 (NAFSA, 2012).

In addition to the economic benefits, having international students on campus enables universities to benefit from diversity in the student population (Bolsman and Miller, 2008; British Council, 2004). International students also bring other benefits to universities and local students. Their presence can lead to courses which are enriched with international content and a wider range of programmes for UK domestic students (British Council, 2004).

A further benefit for the host country's society is greater understanding of other cultures, as highlighted by Johnson, Baker and Creedy (1999). This is consistent with the previous UK Prime Minister Tony Blair's statement that:

Wherever I travel I meet international leaders who have studied in Britain. Dynamic, intelligent people who chose Britain because we offer high-quality education and training. This is good news for the UK. People who are educated here have a lasting tie to our country. They promote Britain in the world, helping our trade and democracy (British Council, 2004: 2).

From his statement, it can be suggested that people who graduate from the UK remain in relationship with the country and the institution from where they graduate. They have a role as presenters of the UK and its institutions when they return home. More evidence to support this point can be found in a study of US graduates undertaken by Peterson, Briggs, Dreasher, Horner and Nelson (1999: 68). They illustrate that:

The American government and U.S. citizens benefit from thousands of former Fulbright grantees and millions of United States-educated international alumni. Many are political and economic leaders, with fond memories of Americans and their alma maters.

2.2.1.2 Trends in Higher Education Marketing

Rapid growth in international higher education occurred in the period from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. During this period many institutes in education

exporting countries entered the international market (Chadee and Naidoo, 2009). McMahon (1988) states that:

During the period, higher education in US, UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, for example, become more widely accessible to a larger number of international students as competition among higher education institutions in these countries increased following the realization of the export potential of higher education (cited in Chadee and Naidoo, 2009: 176).

These institutions relied on a variety of aggressive promotion programmes to attract international students from all over the world, especially from Asian and Latin American countries, to study at their campuses. This period focused on students travelling to a host country (Chadee and Naidoo, 2009). The above study is consistent with that of Mazzarol, Soutar, and Sim Yaw Seng (2003), who referred to this trend as “the first wave” of the globalization of international education.

Between 1985 and 2000, key education providers such as the US, the UK, Canada and Australia adopted forward strategies to acquire a larger international market. These strategies included joint ventures with local higher education providers in offshore markets and the establishing of twinning programmes (Chadee and Naidoo, 2009). This forward integration into offshore markets has been called “the second wave” of the globalization of international education and became common in Asia throughout the 1990s (Mazzarol et al., 2003). The advantage of such initiatives is that they allow more international students to study for a foreign degree while staying in their home country. In this way, the cost of study is reduced for the students (Chadee and Naidoo, 2009).

From 2000 to the present, higher education marketing strategies have moved from joint ventures and twinning programme with local institutions to entering and expanding into foreign markets by opening offshore campuses overseas (Chadee and Naidoo, 2009). A number of these “third wave” internationalization strategies can be clearly seen in the Asia-Pacific region, in countries such as Singapore and Malaysia (Mazzarol et al., 2003), and in the Middle East region,

for example in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar (Chadee and Naidoo, 2009; Altbach and Knight, 2007). According to the Observatory on Borderless Higher Education (OBHE) (2010), 162 offshore campuses have been identified in 36 countries. The US has the greatest number of offshore wholly-owned and operated campuses (78), followed by Australia (14), the UK (13), France (11) and India (11). The evidence from OBHE (2006) suggests that English-speaking countries do not necessarily play a significant exporter role by running offshore campuses. New Zealand, for example, has not yet operated any offshore campuses in the overseas market. In contrast, new players have rapidly expanded their offshore campuses in many countries. Examples of these are India and the Netherlands. Indian universities operate 4 offshore campuses in the United Arab Emirates and one offshore campus in Singapore. The Netherlands' universities run owned and operated campuses in both South Africa and Qatar (Chadee and Naidoo, 2009). In 2011 the UK has increased the number of offshore campuses to 25, overtaking Australia (12) while the US has remained 78 (Matthews, 2012). In 2012, the number of offshore campuses was reported as having increased to 200 campuses, or a 23 per cent increase from 2009, and 37 more offshore campuses are scheduled to open by 2013 (*Times Higher Education*, 2012b).

Although twinning programmes and joint ventures with local universities were popular during the 1990s, some researchers have criticized such internationalization strategies. Mazzarol and Hosie (1997) advise that quality control over these programmes can be difficult to maintain as a result of the programme needing to be run jointly with local partners in the country. Mazzarol et al. (2003) add that "The license or joint venture partner must be "respectable" within their home market and must provide high quality facilities and effective marketing support" (p.92). Furthermore, Nicholls (1987) highlights the fact that locally hired teaching staff need equivalent qualifications to those held by the teaching staff in the original institutes, as well as using equivalent course content and teaching material. Altbach and Knight (2007) also suggest the following issues arising from delivering education to students in their home countries:

- Whether the programmes, the cross-border courses delivered by the institutions, companies, and networks are registered, licensed, or recognized by the sending and the receiving country;
- How quality assurance and quality monitoring from the regulators to public or private institution in cross-border education has been managed?
- The role of accreditation
- “The need for mechanisms that recognized the academic and professional qualifications gained through domestic or international delivery of education for purposes of employment and further study” (p.302)
- A review of the policy and regulatory environment needed.

In the case of overseas offshore campuses, although the number offshore campuses is still growing (*Times Higher Education*, 2012b), this cannot guarantee the success of institutions. This is shown by the fact that 14 offshore campuses have been closed in recent years, including De Montfort University’s South African campus (*Times Higher Education*, 2010a). According to *Times Higher Education* (2010a), two main problems of offshore campuses are their limited curriculum offerings and under-capacity enrolments by students. These risks are important for institutions and impact future success.

The move toward ‘forward integration’, i.e. joint venture partnerships, twinning programmes and offshore campuses, may affect the original “first wave” institutions (where students move to education exporting countries). At this point, Mazzarol et al. (2003) argue that institutions that choose to remain in the first wave may not fail but have to differentiate themselves from other institutions to remain attractive to international students and find a niche market that can justify the extra costs of studying abroad:

“Such institutions are likely to have leading edge centers of research or teaching, which cannot be easily duplicated internationally. Institutions providing “standard” programs are likely to find it increasingly difficult to attract “export” students, as they are not providing enough additional value. Such a differentiation is consistent with international product life-

cycle theory that suggested, as a market matures, low cost production moves to countries with cheaper infrastructure and labor, leaving high value-added production in the originating country” (Mazzarol et al., 2003: 96).

At the same time, second wave institutions, who have partners and joint ventures with local institutions, may find themselves vulnerable to aggressive strategies by ‘third wave’ competitors as these competitors offer better quality programmes at a lower cost than ‘second wave’ institutions (Mazzarol et al., 2003).

2.2.1.3 Growth of Regional Educational Hubs

According to Mazzarol et al. (2003), since the growth of the third wave many countries have developed themselves into regional education hubs. Regional education hubs are an attempt by non-English-speaking countries in regions such as Asia and the Middle-East to encourage world-class academic institutes to set up campuses in their countries. The aim is to persuade local and international students to study in their countries rather than going to traditional education provider countries such as the US, the UK or Australia. Mazzarol et al. (2003) highlight the fact that Malaysia has announced a policy of making Malaysia a regional hub for education service provision. The Education Act (1998) permits establishing foreign university branch campuses in the country. Singapore has made a similar announcement in order to position itself as a top choice of educational place (American Council on Education, 2006). In 1997, the Economic Development Board of Singapore announced plans to attract the “top-ten” international universities into Singapore in order to create a regional education hub by 2008 (Mazzarol et al., 2003). To do this, millions of dollars were poured by Singapore’s government into creating an education hub in Asia and educational services are expected to generate about five per cent of its gross domestic product in the next decade (CNN, 2003). In addition, according to the American Council on Education (2006), two educational hubs have emerged in the Middle East. The first is the Knowledge Village in Dubai, the United Arab Emirates. The other one is the Education City in Doha, Qatar. Both countries have established themselves as hosts of various foreign education providers and training centres.

The increasing number of education hubs in the international market indicates that international students may benefit from a variety of choices when selecting the best university for them. It follows that the competition between education providing countries is likely to be extremely strong in this more complex market.

2.2.2 Marketing Higher Education in the United Kingdom

According to Naude and Ivy (1999), the UK's higher education institutes have to sell themselves strongly in the market to increase the number and quality of student enrolments. The reasons behind this come from changes of circumstance in the past which have forced institutions to enter the market. Firstly, the government cut funding to higher education, making its situation more precarious (Palihawadana, and Holmes, 1999; Marginson, 2004; Naude and Ivy, 1999; Russell, 2005; Holloway and Holloway, 2005). Therefore, higher education institutes have had to recruit more international students into the country in order to generate revenue (Russell, 2005). Secondly, former polytechnics were given university status in 1992 after the introduction of the Higher Education Act, 1992. This resulted in there being more than 130 universities in the system and a variety of colleges and educational institutes offering more courses or franchised university degree courses (Naude and Ivy, 1999). This meant that more players were involved in the market. Finally, along with technological changes and reductions in cost there has been an increase in distance learning and Internet-based courses (Naude and Ivy, 1999). These factors have pushed student numbers downwards. In this sense, international students are regarded as additional income for the country.

In 1999, "the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI1)" was launched to attract international and non-European students to the UK. The targets were to bring in an additional 50,000 international students to UK higher education by 2005, to become the world's leading country for international education, and to win market share from major competitors such as the US and Australia. The intentions of this campaign were to strengthen the UK's education brand and to sell higher education through the assistance of British Council offices all over the world. A subsequent campaign was launched in January 2000 to brand British education (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Russell,

2005; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawadana, 2007). In April 2006, the second phase of the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI2) was launched. The aims of the five-year strategy were to attract an additional 100,000 international students over the next five years, to secure a leading position in international education, to establish partnerships with universities overseas (American Council on Education, 2006; The British Council, 2010a), and "The initiative is expected to bring long-term economic returns by attracting talent and building sustainable partnerships in research abroad" (American Council on Education, 2006: 13).

At present, according to The British Council (2002), the main priorities of the British Council are to promote international higher education and to increase grants throughout its network (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003). Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007) also suggest that the UK's universities should carry out collaborative work with the British Council in order to promote higher education to the country as the British Council will work on promoting British education as a whole.

The UK is the second market leader after the US as it contributes 10 per cent of the market share of international students (OECD, 2011b). According to the UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA) (2013), there were 435,230 international students in 2011-12. Among these, China and India were the most strongly represented among countries that send their students to the UK (78,715 and 29,900 students respectively). Thailand was ninth in terms of student numbers (non-EU) as over 6,800 Thai students are currently enrolled in full-time study in the UK. From those 6,800 students, 4,190 students or 61.62 per cent enrolled in Master's degree (British Council, 2013). This figure indicates that Master's degree students are worthwhile as the greatest target market in Thailand for UK universities. The challenge of competing in the world market suggests that the UK should equip itself with more marketing strategies in order to leverage its market position. Many researchers have studied the UK's higher education marketing (e.g. Ivy, 2001; Ivy, 2008; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Kinnell, 1989; Maringe and Carter, 2007; Russell, 2005). Some researchers show that the UK is chosen primarily because of its educational standard, because its qualifications are recognised worldwide

(Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Russell, 2005; Maringe and Carter, 2007; *Times Higher Education*, 2010b), and because of its reputation (*Independent*, 2004; Kinnell, 1989). However, there is little research or literature focused on the perception of the UK higher education and its penetration in overseas markets, especially regarding developing countries such as Thailand.

2.2.3 The Concept of Marketing Mix in Higher Education

To better understand how different marketing concepts apply to higher education, it is useful to know who higher education's customers are. This is because the core of marketing concepts is the imperative to satisfy the needs of consumers. There has been controversy over the concept of customers in higher education. In 1990, there was a debate over who was the real customer of higher education (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). Hill (1995) and Arambewela and Hall (2006) supported the idea that students are the primary customers. This thesis takes the position that students are the main customers of higher education as they are the ones who decide to undertake overseas education, pay tuition fees, have university experiences and keep close ties with their university even after graduation. Universities are in the position of delivering services to students by providing high-quality of education and infrastructures. On the other hand, many scholars comment that students are not only the customers in higher education. For example, Kotler and Fox (1995) argue that students are only raw materials and graduates are products which support the requirement of the employers. In this sense, the customers are employers who need and want high-quality graduates to take on jobs. Kotler and Fox (1995) further put forward the idea that universities additionally serve the public; therefore, governments, parents and local communities are also customers of higher education. This stakeholder concept is widely found in research by many scholars of higher education (e.g. Kinnell, 1989; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Rowley, 1997; Nicolescu, 2009; Hazelkorn, 2008). As many stakeholders are involved in higher education, it is difficult for an institute to serve the needs and wants of these different groups and this results in difficulties for marketing activities (Nicolescu, 2009).

Since higher education is regarded as a service sector, marketing in higher education may not resemble the marketing of physical products (Nicholls,

Harris, Morgan and Sims, 1995). According to the traditional 4 Ps, the four marketing strategies are Product, Price, Place and People. **Product** is what is being sold (Ivy, 2008). In relation to higher education, a service product is different from a tangible product. Ivy (2008) supports the idea that the product in higher education is the degree that is awarded, while the student is the customer because he or she pays the university for this degree. Different views of products in higher education include course subjects, the options offered and additional student services (Nicholls et al., 1995). Krachenberg (1972) highlights the point that one challenge of the university's role is that it does not only teach but is also under pressure to take on research and social service roles. The **Price** element deals with the strategy for setting up prices for educational service (Nicolescu, 2009). This includes fees, scholarships, bursaries and the admission requirements of the university (Nicholls et al., 1995). According to Ivy (2008), pricing strategies affect not only universities' revenues but also students' perceptions of universities' service quality. In the case of international students, pricing may affect students' decisions to select one country rather than another if they cannot pay the higher tuition fees in the latter on top of accommodation and expenses. **Place** refers to where a university serves its students. Nicholls et al. (1995) suggest that the place strategy includes delivery methods, class locations, class timetables and teaching methods. **Promotion** refers to all the tools that a university can use to provide its products to the market, e.g. advertising, publicity, public relations and sales promotions (Ivy, 2008).

Many scholars suggest that the traditional 4 Ps concept is inadequate for the marketing of services, and so another additional 3 Ps (people, physical facilities and process) have been introduced for higher education (Ivy, 2008; Nicholls et al., 1995; Harvey and Busher, 1996). **People** can be academic lecturers and support staff who provide non-academic support for students (Nicholls et al., 1995). Many universities that have a number of international students provide some training for their service staff on how to serve people who come from different backgrounds and cultures. **Physical facilities** include teaching materials, building ambience, online materials and sport facilities, all of which can help students' study lives. The final P, **Process**, relates to the administrative and bureaucratic functions of the university (Ivy, 2008). At this

point, students deal with registration, exam results, class timetables and graduation. The university has to ensure that all such processes are correct and effective.

Ivy (2008) applied the 7Ps concept to determine whether the traditional service marketing mix was used by postgraduate students when selecting an MBA programme in South Africa. He found that neither the traditional 4Ps (product, price, place and promotion) nor the 7Ps (the addition of people, physical facilities and process to the 4Ps) were necessarily appropriate marketing approaches for MBA programmes. Hence, he provided a new 7P marketing mix. These new 7Ps came from four new distinctive elements (programme, prominence, prospectus and premium) along with three from the traditional service marketing mix (price, people and promotion) and comprised a new marketing mix based on MBA students' opinions. Among these factors, the programme (e.g. the range of electives and majors) and prominence (e.g. academic staff reputation, league tables and on-line information) were the most important elements in the marketing mix (Ivy, 2008).

The 7P transactional marketing approach has been applied in other higher education research. Product and price have been found to be the most important strategies for attracting international students to the UK. Thus, the best ways to attract more international students to UK universities are to lower tuition fees, provide more scholarships, and deliver better quality of care and services (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). In terms of people, it is important that academic and support staff provide services for students that satisfy them in terms of getting what they have paid for. Cubillo et al. (2006) found that the reputation of teaching staff was perceived as an important factor for postgraduate students when selecting an institution. Research by Palihawadana and Holmes (1999) in a UK university reported that students (Norwegian and British students) made positive evaluations of every aspect of instructor characteristics, with 'mastery of subject matter' receiving the highest score.

Concerning the promotional strategies of UK universities, it has been found that a variety of promotional strategies are applied to overseas marketing (Binsardi

and Ekwulugo, 2003; Maringe and Foskett, 2002; Kinnell, 1989; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2006; Cheung et al., 2011; Gray et al., 2003; Willis and Kennedy, 2004). These include, for example, alumni, friends and relatives (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003), brochures and pamphlets (Maringe and Foskett, 2002; Willis and Kennedy, 2004), printed media (Kinnell, 1989; Gray et al., 2003; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003), the British Council (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2006; Cheung et al., 2011) and websites (Gray et al., 2003; Cheung et al., 2011). Additionally, Ivy (2001) indicates that new UK universities mainly focus on selling strategies and target aggressive promotional strategies such as school careers counselling, direct mail, open days on campus and recruiters visiting schools. In contrast, older UK universities appear to use their image, teaching, research and staff reputations for promotion.

Although Nicolescu (2009) states that placing strategies cannot be applied in the higher education sector, many studies highlight their importance. For example, Forbes-Mewett, Nyland and Shao (2010) point out that when selecting a study destination safety is a high priority factor in parents' assessments of prospective host countries. Additionally, environmental and geographic proximity were found to influence students' choices when selecting a host country (Mazzarol, Kemp and Savery, 1997; Cubillo et al., 2006; Chapman, 1981). Furthermore, the location of a university can refer to the absolute place where the university is located and determine its success (Kotler and Fox, 1995; Isherwood, 1991). Joseph and Joseph (1997) also illustrated that 'ideal location' and 'excellent campus layout and appearance' were among seven important choice criteria for students selecting institutions in New Zealand.

2.2.4 Related Higher Education Marketing Factors

2.2.4.1 College and University Ranking

This section explains university ranking, which is a marketing strategy that universities use worldwide to promote their performance. The importance of university ranking as a powerful information source for prospective students is also highlighted below, as well as the impact of university ranking.

In the past two decades, the ranking of higher education institutions has become significant across the world (Clark, 2007; Dill, 2006). Usher and Savino

(2007: 5) define university ranking as follows: “University rankings are lists of certain groupings of institutions (usually, but not always, within a single national jurisdiction), comparatively ranked according to a common set of indicators in descending order”. The data for each indicator are scored and later weighed and aggregated. To create scores, the institution which has the highest score for a particular indicator is given 100 marks, then lower-scoring institutions are ranked according to how close they are to the highest-ranking institution’s score (Usher and Medow, 2009). These indicators differ according to each university ranking system; for example, some rankings may focus on research performance while others pay more attention to peer review. Table 2.1 shows that different league table systems use different indicators and weightings, so each ranking has different results. For example, in 2010 the University of Oxford was 6th in the *THES* ranking but it was the 10th according to the Jiao Tong ranking (*Times Higher Education*, 2010c and ARWU, 2010).

There are well-known world ranking agencies or websites, such as the academic ranking of the world universities compiled by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University of China, The *Times Higher Education* Ranking and the Webometrics Ranking of World Universities. However, the two best-known international university rankings in the world, which are studied by many authors, are the Shanghai Jiao Tong University of China (Jiao Tong) and *The Times Higher Education Supplement (THES)* World University Ranking (Usher and Savino, 2007; Taylor and Braddock, 2007).

Table 2.1: League Table Weightings

Publication	Initial characteristics	Learning Inputs- staff	Learning Inputs- resources	Learning outputs	Final outcomes	Research	Reputation
Asiaweek (India/Asia)	25	28.3	10	0	0	16.7	20
Guardian University Guide	28	35	10	10	17	0	0
Newsweek (US)	10	20	10	0	0	60	0
Shanghai Jiao Tong University (International/China)	0	0	0	10	0	90	0
The Times Good University Guide(UK)	3.3	53.3	6.7	3.3	3.3	30	0
Times World University Ranking (UK)	5	25	0	0	0	20	50
US News and World Report (US)	15	20	15	25	0	0	25
Wuhan (China)	10.6	8.5	16.6	3.4	0.6	48.6	11.7

Source: Adapted from Usher and Savino (2007)

The Jiao Tong ranking was first published in 2003 by the Institute of Higher Education, Shanghai Jiao Tong University, and aimed to fill the gap between Chinese and world-class universities (Liu and Cheng, 2005). The ranking uses several indicators of the academic or research performance of both alumni and staff who have won Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals, highly cited researchers in a wide range of disciplines, articles published by staff in the journals *Science* and *Nature*, articles published by staff in a wide range of other academic journals, and academic performance by size of institution (Liu, Cheng and Liu, 2005; Taylor and Braddock, 2007). A summary of the Jiao Tong system is given in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Criteria and Weights for the Jiao Tong Ranking - 2004

Criteria	Indicator	Code	Weight
Quality of education	Alumni of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals	Alumni	10%
Quality of faculty	Staff of an institution winning Nobel Prizes and Fields Medals	Award	20%
	Highly cited researchers in 21 broad subject categories	HiCi	20%
Research output	Articles published in Nature and Science	N&S	20%
	Articles Indexed in Science Citation Index-Expanded and Social Science Citation Index	SCI	20%
Size of institution	Academic performance with respect to the size of an institution	Size	10%
Total			100%

Source: Liu et al. (2005)

It can be seen from tables 2.1 and 2.2 that the Jiao Thong ranking weighs largely on research performance (90 per cent). In other words, it is solely focused on research (Marginson, 2007a).

Although it is highly respected, however, the Jiao Thong ranking has been widely criticized that it does not give information on teaching excellence (Taylor and Braddock, 2007). On this point, Cheng and Liu (2007:25) argue that “It would be impossible to rank the quality of university education worldwide

because of substantial differences of universities in a large variety of countries and the technical difficulties in obtaining internationally comparable data". Therefore, it is difficult to find standardized international measurements of teaching quality. The only data sufficiently reliable for ranking universities are comparable data on measurable research performances (Cheng and Liu, 2007; Marginson, 2007).

The next criticism of the Jiao Thong ranking arises from its focus on Nobel Prizes and Field Medals. This is because only the scientific Nobel Prizes are counted, e.g. physics, chemistry, medicine and economics. The Nobel Prizes for literature and peace are overlooked (Taylor and Braddock 2007), as are other distinguished scientific awards such as the A.M. Turing Award and the Bruce Gold Medal (Billaut, Bouyssou and Vincke, 2010). Further, Marginson and van der Wende (2006) add that ninety one per cent of the Nobel Prize awards have gone to people from high-income nations; in particular, the majority have gone to people from the US. People from developing nations have won Nobel Prizes for literature or peace but have been excluded from the Jiao Thong ranking indicators.

Another critique of the Jiao Thong ranking raised by Marginson and van der Wende (2006) is that universities which are strong in the sciences and universities from English-speaking nations benefit unduly from the Jiao Thong system. For example, the principal criteria in the ranking mainly relate to in the science-based disciplines (e.g. Nobel Prizes, articles published in *Science* and *Nature*) and global research published in English (Marginson, 2007a). American universities also benefit from the Jiao Thong ranking because massive numbers of HiCi researchers (3,614) are based in the US and Americans tend to cite other Americans (Marginson and van der Wende, 2006; Marginson, 2007a).

The second ranking is the World University Ranking from the *Times Higher Education Supplement* (THES). The THES ranking was first published in November 2004 (Usher and Savino, 2007). Its aim is to produce a summative, holistic ranking (Marginson, 2007b). Unlike the Jiao Thong ranking, the THES

focuses on different criteria of which half relate to university reputations (Marginson, 2007b). The following Table 2.3 describes the *THES* criteria index¹.

Table 2.3: *The Times Higher University Ranking*: weightings

Indicator	Weight
'Peer review' survey of academics	40
Survey of 'global employers'	10
Proportion of academic faculty who are foreign	5
Proportion of students who are foreign	5
Staff-student ratio (proxy for teaching quality)	20
Research citations per head of academic faculty	20
Total	100

Source: *THES* (2006)

The *THES* ranking has been subjected to many criticisms. These relate firstly to its criteria, which rest largely on peer review. Peer review accounts for 40 per cent of its ranking weights (Taylor and Braddock, 2007; Marginson, 2007a; Marginson, 2007b). In making this point, Taylor and Braddock (2007) state that peer review is based on the opinions of researchers from a cross-section of universities. These opinions are subjective and cannot be measured, unlike research and publications, which are clearly objective, measurable criteria. Furthermore, the peer review assessors may have a strong regional bias because they are asked to rate those universities in their own region rather than to rate universities across the world. Thus, for example, Australian universities probably gain a better ranking due to them only having to compete in the Asia-Pacific region (Taylor and Braddock, 2007).

The second criticism relates to methodology. Marginson (2007b: 7) comments that:

It is not specified who is surveyed or what questions are asked. The survey gathers a response of just 1 per cent from 200,000 emails sent worldwide and not all responses are valid and can be used. The responses that do come in tend to be from nations where the *Times* is

¹ League table was the current one at the time of study but it continues to change subsequently.

well known, so the composition of the pool of responses is heavily weighted in favour of the UK, Australia and some former British colonial locations, for example in Southeast Asia.

Therefore, the *THES* outcomes may be too easily to manipulate, causing universities in the UK and Australia to gain relatively stronger performances.

Thirdly, it is said that the results are highly volatile because the indicators and methods vary over time (Marginson, 2007b). Institutions can sometimes rise or fall several positions in the league tables without any significant changes having occurred to justify this (OECD, 2004). For example, in 2004, the University of Malaya was ranked by the *THES* at 89th in the world. The vice-chancellor ordered huge banners declaring 'UM a world's top 100 university' to be placed around the city. Unfortunately, in 2005, the *THES* changed the definition of Chinese and Indian students at the University of Malaya from international to national students. Therefore, the University of Malaya dropped from 89th to 169th without any decline in its performance. The reputation of the university abroad and at home went into free fall (Fahey, 2007; University World News, 2007; Marginson, 2007a, 2007b). This example shows that these rankings are questionable and contentious.

As can be seen from the information above, neither the *THES* nor the Jiao Thong ranking system is perfect. This is supported by the following illustration:

“Any system of rankings is purpose-driven, with outcomes shaped by the assumptions and values built into the methods of comparison and calculation. In that sense, all rankings systems are both incomplete as description of the reality of higher education (e.g., the performance of a nation's research-intensive university says nothing about the performance of its specialist business school or its technical training institutes) and contain built-in bias.” (Marginson and van der Wende, 2007: 308).

2.2.4.2 The Impact of University Ranking

University ranking is one of several tools that set out to measure the excellence of universities (Taylor and Braddock, 2007). The ranking may affect the prestige, image, quality and reputation of an individual institute as people are likely to respect and trust the ranking results that come out each year. Dill (2006) illustrates that most university ranking systems claim that they are designed to inform students' choices about programmes and particular institutes. Prospective students, scholars and their parents may use the information provided by university ranking to make their decision about which is the best university. Tarry (2008) states that in the UK there are four newspapers which publish British university league tables: *The Sunday Times*, *The Times*, the *Financial Times* and the *Guardian*. These publishers facilitate parents' and students' access to the ranking of universities for a particular year in order to measure performances between universities and consequently improve their decision making.

Hazelkorn (2008) found that students use ranking as a shortlisting method when selecting a university, especially postgraduate students. This result is consistent with Federkeil (2002), who found that 50 per cent of engineering students in Germany selected a university on the basis of university ranking (CHE ranking). Similar research by Robert and Thomson (2007 cited in Hazelkorn, 2008) stated that more than 90% of international students agreed that UK league tables were important/very important to their choice of institute within the UK

There is evidence that university ranking has an important impact on university reputation and that "reputation indicators play a significant role in ranking" (Federkeil, 2009: 19). This view is also confirmed by Hazelkorn (2008), who states that "reputation derived from league tables is a critical determinant for [student] applicant" and students are "more attracted to [a] university because of high ranking" (p.21).

It can be seen that reputation has been used as one of major indicators in most ranking systems. One of the two well-known global ranking systems, that of the *THES*, uses two indicators of reputation (reputation among scholars and

reputation among global employers) and these make up fifty per cent of the total score (see Table 2.3).

Furthermore, it can be accepted that a particular university which is placed more favourably in a ranking system may gain greater brand recognition benefits and perform well in terms of its university brand position in the market in the following year. Evidence of this was found in a study undertaken by Cornell University in the United States. The study found that a more favourable ranking in the 'U.S. News and World Report's' results increased the enrolment yield, led to higher student quality and decreased scholarship aids (Bednowitz, 2000). This is consistent with Federkeil (2002: 395), who adds that:

A good example of the effects can be shown for psychology, which was first included in the CHE ranking in 2001. A year later, the number of applicants for admission to the recommended universities increased notably, while they remained stable overall.

University ranking is also beneficial for overseas governments. Tarry (2008) reports that the Royal Thai Government utilizes university rankings in order to stipulate the overseas universities and courses scholarship students are eligible to study in. The Mongolian government also uses university ranking by funding only those of their students who are admitted to highly ranked universities (Clarkes, 2007). These examples indicate that ranking can be used as an indicator of 'value-for-money'.

Another impact of university ranking is that it influences the employment opportunities and earning outcomes of students after graduation. Many researchers support this idea, e.g. Reese (1998) and Rindova, Williamson and Petkova (2005). For example, Rindova et al. (2005) found that the US companies pay higher salaries to employees who have graduated from a top-ranked American business school. This is in line with data obtained from *The Times Good University Guide*. These data show that graduates from high-rank universities such as Oxford, Cambridge or the London School of Economics have the best earning outcomes (Clarkes, 2007).

2.2.4.3 University Brands and School Brands

Universities have corporate and sub-brands. The corporate brand is 'the university' and this is used on all programme and service offerings. Sub-brands work as individual brands for target markets. In the university context an individual brand offering to the individual target market is the faculties, the schools, and the departments. Each of the schools, faculties or departments has its independence in terms of verbal and visual identity (Petromilli et al., 2002).

It is accepted that for some universities the brands of particular schools are more famous than the university brand in the minds of students. Students may get information on school brands by going to the school's website rather than to the university's website, or they may get information from a university ranking website which ranks by area of study. As a result, confusion may occur among students when information is communicated to them from the university. In relation to this problem, the study by Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007) on UK universities' brand harmonization highlights the need for alignment between school and university brands when universities market themselves in the global market in order to compete more effectively. Conflicts may occur when different schools and faculties experience losses to their independence and also pressure to align their market positioning with that of the university. This is due to some schools having developed a strong brand image of their own in the past and leaving the university behind (Hemsley-Brown, and Goonawardana, 2007).

Furthermore, in a global market where most universities wish to attract students to their home campuses, brand standardization has to be adopted. UK universities may coordinate their activities through the British Council in order to enhance their market activities (Mazzarol and Soutar, 1999). The key point here is that the British Council will promote UK universities as a whole through its branches all over the world. The assistance of overseas promotion via the British Council can also help ensure that schools work in harmony with the university as a whole (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007).

2.2.4.4 Place Brands, Destination Brands

People may know some institutes through other factors, including location. When people make a decision about a university, they may trust information from friends or family who have experienced a particular university (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). Place, or destination, thus acts like a brand. Marketers of places or destinations have adapted marketing techniques and strategies like brand strategy to places and destinations in order to improve the perceptions or images of these. This works not only for travel destinations but also for attracting inward investment, enhancing the existing culture and heritage, and welcoming new residents, employees and skilled migrants (Hankinson, 2007). According to Hankinson (2005; 25), a place brand may create “differentiation through preparation of logos, symbols and strap-lines”. Examples of this can be seen in cities such as Sydney or Beijing when they hosted the Olympic Games, enhancing their images and reputations as well-known places across the world (Hankinson, 2007). The concept of a place brand can be linked to higher education marketing if students, acting as customers, perceive the image or reputation of a place where a university is located. An interview conducted with Mr. K during the author’s fieldwork in Thailand provided a good example of place branding. After receiving offers from many universities in the UK, Mr. K, a prospective master’s degree student from Thailand, chose to study at the University of Liverpool. Although the University of Liverpool did not have good league table performance, he made this decision based on the fact that everybody in Thailand knows Liverpool’s football team and, when he told his friends about studying at the University of Liverpool, everybody said ‘Yes, I know that university’. This can be explained by the fact that Mr. K’s perception was linked to a place brand via the popularity of the Premier League, and the football club’s reputation was linked to the university’s name. This is may be a benefit for universities in cities with well-known football teams.

The above examples help explain how place branding such as Liverpool may create benefits for some universities because students or parents are likely to link their acceptance of a university with these factors. Thus they can affect one’s awareness and decision making when choosing a university.

2.3 Service Quality and Satisfaction

2.3.1 Perception of Quality

Consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction is defined by “the overall feelings, or attitude, a person has about a product after it has been purchased” (Solomon, Bamossy and Askegaard, 1999: 256). Linder-Pelz (1982 cited in Gotlieb, Grewal and Brown, 1994: 875) defines satisfaction as “primarily and effective response to a specific consumptive experience”. Hence, it can be understood that satisfaction is a post-purchase or post-consumption response.

The main principle of marketing is that all marketing should focus on customers' wants and needs: “Marketing exists when people decide to satisfy their needs and wants through exchange” (Kotler and Fox, 1995: 5). This is certainly true as companies and service providers are concerned about what customers want and try to meet their needs by offering the right products or services in order to satisfy them. This marketing orientation approach is used to differentiate offerings from those of competitors. For example, in higher education market orientation may be used to satisfy customers through its design, communication, pricing strategy, programme availability and services (Kotler and Fox, 1995). However, Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka (2006) argue that many higher education institutions have overlooked the importance of the marketing orientation approach to customers. Total quality management systems (TQM) have also been adopted by firms to enhance their customers' perceptions of quality or products (Ford, Joseph and Joseph, 1999), leading to customer satisfaction and the retention of customers.

According to Moogan et al. (2011), the decision-making process in higher education is complex. Prospective undergraduate students tend to seek for much information on possible universities from many sources and in order to evaluate them and make the right choice (Moogan and Baron, 2003). In many cases, the quality of the educational experience, graduation rates, job opportunities, alumni donation rates and graduates who have become business leaders have had their value for money estimated before the decision is made (Clarkes, 2007). Kotler and Fox (1985: 43) state that:

Since value is the relationship between price and quality, the institution can increase value in two ways: reduce price (across the board or through financial aid for certain students) and/or increase quality.

Ford et al. (1999) suggest that institutions need to understand the nature and quality of the services offered because of high and intensifying competition within the market place. Russell (2005) claims that education can be classified as a marketable service in the same way as any another service. Therefore, higher education can be assessed in terms of service quality.

Service quality has been defined as the discrepancy or gap between a consumer's expectation and experience of a service (perception) (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1988), while Zeithaml (1987 cited in Rowley, 1997: 7) defines perceived service quality as "the consumers' judgment about an entity's overall excellence or superiority". According to Rowley (1997: 7), perceived quality is a different concept from satisfaction: "a form of attitude, related to, but not the same as, satisfaction, and resulting from a comparison of expectations with perceptions of performance". Rowley (1997: 8) also claims that:

service quality as perceived by customers stems from a comparison of what they feel that service organizations should offer (i.e. from their expectations) with their perception of the performance of organizations providing the services.

Quality = customer's perception – customer's expectation.

According to Rowley (1997), this discrepancy gap idea is supported by many authors, e.g., Groonroos (1998); Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982); Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) and Sassar et al. (1978).

However, there is confusion over the term "expectation", which has been used differently in the consumer satisfaction literature and the service quality literature. In particular, in the satisfaction literature expectations are viewed as "predictions made by consumers about what is likely to happen during a transaction exchange" (Rowley, 1997:8). In contrast, in the service quality

literature, they are viewed as a desires or wants of consumers, or what consumers feel a service should offer rather than what it will offer (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

To know the degree of service quality of higher education institutions, it is important to focus on students' expectation and their perceptions of their experiences.

Expectations are formed on the basis of experiences, friends and associates, as well as communications with institutions (Kotler and Fox, 1995). Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) and Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990) suggest that expectations are influenced by marketers' communications, word-of-mouth, personal needs and past experiences. Therefore, it is not surprising that, in the higher education context, students may judge the quality of the lecturers in a business class at their university by comparing their current experience with their past experiences of high-school lecturers. This is consistent with Hill (1995), who highlights the idea that it is reasonable for undergraduate students to form their expectations of higher education through their experiences at school. On the other hand, the expectations of postgraduate students may arise from their experiences in previous higher education institutions. In addition, Solomon et al. (1999: 257) suggest that "when people have no experiences they are relatively easy to satisfy, but with growing experience, they become harder to satisfy". Hence, it is important for a company to understand the expectations of their consumers in order to align company performance with consumer expectation and, in turn, reduce the gap between expectations and perceived experiences.

Evidence from Kinnell (1989) from the study of undergraduate, postgraduate taught and postgraduate research students in two UK universities, indicates that students' expectation are set before they arrived in the host country and that these expectations result from the degree of information they receive from a variety of sources, e.g. alumni, employers and promotional materials. As service quality is the gap between the expectation and perception of their experiences at university, if students have expectations that are too high this will affect the service quality gap. Universities may need to reduce students' expectation to

bridge the gap. To do this, they may need to provide prospective students with fact sheets as well as the right information on websites and in prospectuses, such as weather information and inductions for international students (Barnes, 2007).

2.3.2 Relationships between Satisfaction and Service Quality

The concepts of service quality and customer satisfaction are based on different foundations (Rowley, 1997; Gruber, Fuß, Voss and Gläser-Zikuda, 2010). The most common explanation of the difference between the two concepts is that satisfaction is a transaction-specific measure, while perceived service quality is a form of attitude, a long-run overall evaluation (Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Gruber et al., 2010). Rowley (1997) confirms that perceived service quality is a global judgment but satisfaction is related to a specific transaction. As a result, “the two constructs are related, in that incidents of satisfaction over time lead to perceptions of good service quality” (Rowley, 1997: 8).

However, there is an argument about whether perceived service quality and satisfaction have a cause and effect relationship. Many scholars propose that higher levels of perceived service quality result in increased consumer satisfaction, e.g. Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Lee, Lee and Yoo, 2000; Arambewela and Hall, 2008. However, other authors (e.g. Parasuraman et al., 1988; Athiyaman, 1997) argue that satisfaction is an antecedent of service quality. Cronin and Taylor (1992) test the sequential order of the two constructs. The analysis of their research model confirms that service quality is an antecedent of consumer satisfaction. In addition, their results also suggest that service quality exerts a lesser influence on purchase intention than consumer satisfaction. However, later Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1994) and Cronin and Taylor (1994) suggest that the directionality of the two constructs is still in question and need to be revised in the future research. Thus, the antecedents and consequences in the relationship between perceived quality and satisfaction are still debated. Nevertheless, no one accepts that there is no significant relationship between perceived quality and consumer satisfaction.

2.3.3 Measurement of Service Quality

SERVQUAL is an instrument used to measure service quality in service and retail organizations (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The scale was developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985) and refined in 1988. It is one of the most commonly utilized instruments for measuring service quality (Barnes, 2007). Parasuraman et al. (1988: 30) show that “SERVQUAL is a concise multiple-item scale with good reliability and validity that retailers can use to better understand the service expectation and perceptions of consumers and, as a result, improve service”. The 22 attributes of expectation (E) and perception (P) are grouped into five underlying dimensions as follows:

Tangibles: Physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel

Reliability: Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accuracy

Responsiveness: Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service

Assurance: Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence

Empathy: Caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers’ (Parasuraman et al., 1988: 23)

Pothas, De Wet, and De Wet (2001: 83) claim that “SERVQUAL entails measuring the gaps between the perceptions of customers, the level of service provided and the potential of improvement”. Barnes (2007), using a Likert scale ranging from ‘Strongly Agree’ to ‘Strongly Disagree’ in SERVQUAL, asked consumers to provide their feelings for range of statements. The differences between perception (P) and expectation (E) ($Q = P - E$) were used as an indicator to measure service quality. If Q was negative, expectation exceeded perception, so a gap occurred, but if Q was positive, the perception exceeded expectations. Hence, this instrument is able to help the businesses understand their position in the eyes of consumers. SERVQUAL has since been widely and successfully adopted in many service industries, as shown in Table 2.4 below:

Table 2.4 : Major Applications of SERVQUAL

Areas of application	Authors
Banking	Lasser et al., 2000; Marshall and Smith, 1999; Angur et al., 1999
Brokerage services	Lin and Wei, 1999
Building maintenance	Siu et al., 2001
Higher education	Engelland et al., 2001 and 2000; Comm and Mathaisel, 2000; Houston and Rees, 1999; Kwan and Ng, 1999; Hampton, 1993; Davis and Allen, 1990
Information services	Jiang et al., 2000; Van et al., 1999; Kettinger and Lee, 1999
Local authority services	Wisniewski, 2001; McFadyen et al., 2001; Donnelly and Shiu, 1999
Market research	Donnelly et al., 2000
Medical and health care services	Dean, 1999; Curry et al., 1999; Llosa et al., 1998; Headley and Miller, 1993; O'Connor and Bowers, 1990
Restaurant service	Heung et al., 2000
Retailing	Metha et al., 2000a, 2000b
Shipping	Durvasula et al., 1999
Travel services	Kayanama and Black, 2000

Source: Arambewela (2003: 65)

However, a series of criticisms has been made about inappropriate uses of SERVQUAL. For example, Cronin and Taylor (1992) and Carman (1990) argue that the five dimensions of choice criteria used by SERVQUAL are inappropriate. Cronin and Taylor (1992) argue that the SERVQUAL conceptualization is inadequate because “it is based on a satisfaction paradigm rather than an attitude model” (p. 64), and they claim that the SERVQUAL model was confirmed in only two of the four industries in their study. Carman (1990) also tested SERVQUAL in four different industries and found that the five dimensions of SERVQUAL were not generalized enough to use to meet the needs of all industries, for example, product services and pure services (Arambewela and Hall, 2006). Furthermore, Carman (1990) states that expectation cannot remain constant over time. Chapman (1979) also adds that SERVQUAL is limited due to a lack of prior knowledge and experience of university education and the unrealistic expectations of incoming university students.

Although SERVQUAL has been criticised, it is still widely used and adapted to the higher education sector by many researchers; for example, Hill, 1995; Lee et al., 2000; Arambewela, Hall and Zuhair, 2005; Mai, 2005; Arambewela and Hall, 2008; Barnes, 2007; Stodnick and Rogers, 2008. Therefore it can be suggested that SERVQUAL is still a valid instrument that is accepted in higher education and will be used in this study.

An alternative method of assessing service quality is the importance/performance paradigm (IPA). This paradigm has been developed by Martilla and James (1977) as a tool to develop firms' management strategies and has been used in hospitality and tourism (Oh, 2001), education (Ford et al., 1999; Joseph and Joseph, 1997; Douglas, Douglas and Barnes, 2006), automobile (Martilla and James, 1977) and culinary tourism industries (Smith and Costello, 2009). IPA combines measures of importance and performance to assess the quality of a particular service. Martilla and James (1977) claim that "an attractive feature of importance-performance analysis is that the results may be graphically displayed on an easily-interpreted, two dimensional grid" (p.77) (see Figure 2.1).

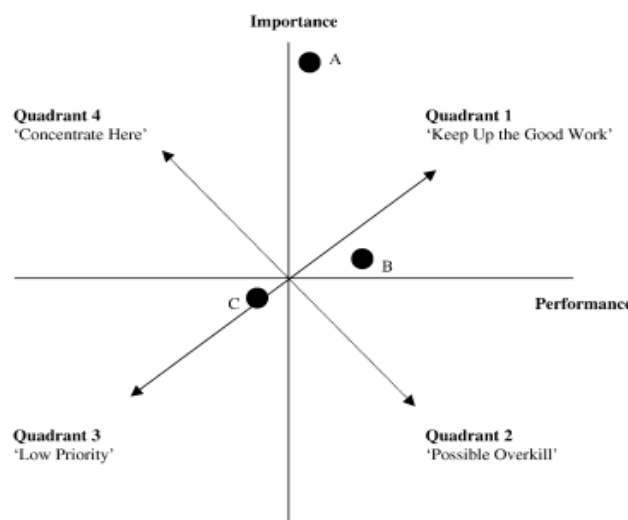


Figure 2.1: Traditional Importance-Performance Grid
Source: Oh (2001)

As can be seen from Figure 2.1, IPA generates four different quadrants based on importance-performance measures. The mean scores are compared and then plotted into one of four grids as explained below:

Keep up the good work: consumers feel that the attributes are very important and are pleased with the company's performance.

Possible overkill: the attributes falling in this quadrant are relatively less important but the company performs well on them.

Low priority: although these service attributes are rated low, consumers do not perceive them to be very important.

Concentrate here: this quadrant represents attributes that consumers feel are very important but they are not very satisfied with them. Thus, managers should focus on increasing performance in these areas.

IPA can be a useful service quality measurement method for a company to apply in order to understand its consumers. For example, if a company discovers attributes that are rated low in importance but high in performance, it should continue to maintain them but not necessarily allocate any additional resources (Martilla and James, 1977). In addition, Oh (2001: 618) illustrates that "IPA provides an attractive snapshot of how well the company meets customers' important concerns on selected attributes and, at the same time, offers guidelines for the company's future resource allocation decisions".

Although the IPA has been widely applied in hospitality, tourism and education research, there are some criticisms of it. Oh (2001) explains that there is ambiguity about whether to use the scale mean or actual mean for the grid. This is because the majority of researchers have used the mean values of observed actual importance and performance ratings whereas, on the other hand, the mean values of the scales have been employed for measuring importance and performance. Therefore, when plotting attributes in the grid, interpretations may differ dramatically depending on which mean is used. Moreover, there is a possibility of potentially misclassifying the attributes on the IPA grid, so the use of a unidirectional scale ('no important' to 'very important') has been suggested instead of a bidirectional one ('very unimportant' to 'very important').

2.3.4 Research into Service Quality, Satisfaction in Higher Education and Student Experiences

In higher education there are different definitions of service quality. O'Neill and Palmer (2004: 42) define service quality in higher education as "the difference between what a student expects to receive and his/her perception of actual delivery". Gordon and Partington (1993 cited in Rowley, 1997: 8) define it as "The success with which an institution provides educational environments which enable students effectively to achieve worthwhile learning goals including appropriate academic standards". Both definitions clearly reveal that service quality in higher education focuses on the learning experience of students (Rowley, 1997). On this point, Rowley (1997) highlights that research on the evaluation of students' experiences can be divided into those which focus on the measurement of teaching and learning and those which assess the quality of their total experience.

Service quality seems very important for higher education. Generally, students who pay tuition fees will expect their university to provide a good service quality that university should provide to them. Specifically, postgraduate international students who pay significantly higher tuition fees than local students may expect a higher quality of service than local students. This is because they will be willing to compare the facilities and environments with those in their home countries (Barnes, 2007). Russell (2005: 70) says that "Student satisfaction influences perceived quality and in turn affects profitability. For these reasons, higher education institutions should aim for high levels of student satisfaction", thereby enhancing perceived quality.

Satisfaction can be explained in terms of disconfirmation judgment. According to Oliver (1981), consumers can experience negative disconfirmations (where performance is less than expected), positive disconfirmations (where performance exceeds expectation) or confirmations (where performance matches expectation). This happens on the basis of a comparison of product performance with expectations in the determination of consumer satisfaction; thus, "the perceived summary disconfirmation judgment is sufficient as a causal agent for satisfaction" (Cronin and Taylor 1994: 126). Subsequently, Athiyaman (1997), in his research on student satisfaction and service quality perceptions,

has suggested that a student's expectations regarding his/her enrolment will be negatively disconfirmed, confirmed or positively disconfirmed. He states that "subjective disconfirmation is the student judgment about the discrepancy between what he/she expects (expectations) of the class and what was obtained (perceived performance)" (p. 529). At this point, positive disconfirmation will arouse in the student pleasant emotions about the course. In contrast, negative disconfirmation may cause feelings such as anger or blame with regard to the lecturer and result in dissatisfaction with the class.

Research undertaken by Martin, Milne-Home, Barrett, Spalding and Jones (2000) on graduates' satisfaction with universities and their perception of the employment preparation carried out found that graduates were more satisfied with the curriculum and staff attributes than with academic and student support resources. In terms of perceived employment preparation, graduates reported relatively greater preparation at local and national levels than at the international level.

Joseph and Joseph (1997), in their research into the perception of the service quality of higher education among 616 New Zealand students, using an importance/performance technique, claim that New Zealand students view academic reputation as the most important factor in terms of service quality, followed by career opportunities. Specifically, the gap between performances minus importance can be explained by the fact that New Zealand students perceive their universities as less than ideal (expectation), suggesting that New Zealand universities have not achieved a high perceived level of service quality, leading to student dissatisfaction.

From the study above it can be assumed that perceived service quality and satisfaction are significant factors for higher education institutes. They need to be taken into account and modified according to customer perceptions, especially given the intense competition in the international market. McDougall and Levesque (2000) highlight the point that customers evaluate service quality through overall judgments about the service and this determines their level of satisfaction. Therefore, these two criteria, service quality and satisfaction, are closely linked and are researched in combination (Townley, 2001). Furthermore,

the link between customer satisfaction and service quality can improve the profitability of the university (Taylor and Cronin, 1994; Russell, 2005).

Many scholars have investigated how higher education students perceive the service quality provided by universities, as well as the degree of their satisfaction.

Table 2.5 summarizes relevant research in international higher education regarding service quality and satisfaction.

Table 2.5: Summary of Studies on Students' Service Quality Perceptions and Satisfaction

Authors	Types	Methods	Results
Mai, 2005	Student satisfaction in the UK and the US	Questionnaire	UK students have lower levels of satisfaction than US students. Student satisfaction is predicted by the perception of the education service.
Arambewela and Hall, 2001	Post-choice satisfaction among Chinese, Indian, Indonesian and Thai students	Questionnaire	Indian students have the lowest levels of satisfaction of all the groups.
Barnes, 2007	Comparison of service quality perceptions among EU and non EU students	Questionnaire Focus group	EU students have lower levels of satisfaction than non-EU ones.
Ford et al., 1999	Comparison of service quality perceptions among NZ and US students	Focus group Questionnaire	Although there are negative gap scores in most service quality factors for both countries, NZ and US students are still satisfied with their overall educational experience
Brown and Mazzarol, 2009	International students from four Australian universities	Questionnaire	Customer loyalty is a result of students satisfaction and students satisfaction come from perceived value by students
Mortimer, 1997	Uni. information requested from 69 UK universities	Participant observation study	Many universities fail to respond to students' enquiries within a reasonable length of time
Oldfield and Baron, 2000	Perception of service quality in a UK university	Focus group Questionnaire	"Acceptable factors" increase over a period of time

Source: Author

However, whereas many researchers focus on students' perceptions, expectations and satisfaction, Rowley (1997) argues that the stakeholders in

higher education are not only students but also their parents and families, the local community, society, the government, the governing body, staff, local authorities and current and potential employers. Therefore, measurements of service quality and satisfaction should attempt to focus on the wider context of these groups of stakeholders as well. This is because all of these stakeholders are concerned with the graduates who are the end product of higher education. Furthermore, Rowley (1997) states that studies of service quality in higher education should not only measure the time students are at university but also take a longer-term view. The longitudinal nature of the educational experience of students means that their perceptions and expectations of higher education may change over a period of time. In response to this, research by Hill (1995) and Oldfield and Baron (2000) has proved that students' perceptions do change over a period of time.

After this review of the service quality and satisfaction literature in higher education, it is suggested that the following attributes have to be taken into consideration:

- Although Barnes (2007) uses SERQUAL dimensions such as responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibility and, reliability in the higher education sector, Athiyaman (1997) suggests that it is more feasible to explain perceived quality in terms of satisfaction by using a manageable set of general university characteristics such as the teaching abilities of lecturers, staff-student consultation sessions, library, computing and recreation facilities, class sizes, the level and difficulty of subject content and student workloads.
- Attributes related to learning, teaching and resources should be focused on as these influence student involvement/learning and may lead to greater student retention and graduation (Lau, 2003)).
- The environment overseas and quality of education overseas, qualification recognition by companies in the home country, counselling services and academic support are also paramount issues (Russell, 2005).
- Joseph and Joseph's study (1997) measured attributes relating to programme issues, academic reputations, physical aspects, career

opportunities, location, time and other factors such as family influences and word of mouth in order to discover student's perceptions.

- Ford et al. (1999) measure service quality using similar factors to those in the study by Joseph and Joseph (1997). These are programme issues, academic reputations, physical aspects, career opportunities, location, time and choice of influences.
- Martin et al. (2000) use attributes such as the curriculum, staff attributes, academic resources, student support services and key competencies to discover graduates' satisfaction their universities.

The above attributes can be used as a guideline and prove useful in terms of giving direction about service quality factors in higher education in this thesis. However, academic services are not the only focus because other services related to students' life experiences, such as accommodation and social life, are also of interest to the researcher. Therefore, this study does not focus solely on teaching but also on a wide range of other service factors which are relevant to students' experiences.

Nevertheless, after reviewing the literature on the experiences of international students in higher education overseas, only a handful of research studies have been found. Merrick (2004) illustrates that previous research in this area is mainly focused on the factors which influence the study destination choices of international students. Therefore, international students' experiences after they have started university are of less interest.

Research that focuses on students' experiences at their universities mostly looks at the integration or mix between international and local students (e.g. Lewins, 1990; Ward and Masgoret, 2004; Merrick, 2004; Mori, 2006; Harrison and Peacock, 2007; Montgomery, 2009; McDowell and Montgomery, 2009; Montgomery, 2010; Pimpa, 2011). Some of these highlight the teaching aspect (Raelin and Schermerhorn, 1994; Lord and Dawson, 2002) and some experiences of accommodation (Mori, 2006; Paltridge, Mayson and Schapper, 2010; Khozaei, Hassan and Razak, 2011).

Many scholars have found that language ability plays an important role in students' university experiences. International students have been reported to have some difficulties in lectures and tutorials, oral presentations and assignments due to their language ability (Ward and Masgoret, 2004; Mori, 2006; Smith and Khawaja, 2011). Merrick (2004) also noted that over 50 per cent of students for whom English was not their first language were concerned about their language ability before they arrived in the UK. After spending some time in their university, only 20 per cent were still concerned about this issue at the time of the research. Furthermore, language ability is also associated with the mix between students. In particular, integration between international and local students has been researched in many countries, including New Zealand (Ward and Masgoret, 2004) and the UK (Kinnell, 1989; Lewins, 1990; Merrick, 2004; Mori, 2006; Harrison and Peacock, 2007; Montgomery, 2009, 2010). Such studies have found limited integration between international and local students, with language being a significant barrier to friendship between the two groups (Lewins, 1990; Ward and Masgoret, 2004; Merrick, 2004; Harrison and Peacock, 2007; Montgomery, 2010; Smith and Khawaja, 2011). Interestingly, some international students in the UK and New Zealand were accepting of the fact that they had no local friends (Ward and Masgoret, 2004; Merrick, 2004). Although Merrick (2004) suggests that a high proportion of international students in classes, especially in business areas, may be a cause of lack of integration, many scholars point out other factors involved in such integration. For example, Montgomery (2009) illustrates that the failure to develop friendships between international and local students result from them spending less time together.

Furthermore, Harrison and Peacock (2007: 4) highlight stereotyping between the two parties as a cause of misunderstandings. On one hand, international students were perceived by local students as "shy", "introverted", "difficult to get to know" and sometimes "annoying". Local students also had some anxiety about conversing with international students in case they said the wrong thing or were misunderstood. These factors discourage attempts at friendship with international students (Harrison and Peacock, 2007). On the other hand, international students perceived local students (British students) as reserved (Montgomery, 2010) and "cold, uncaring, unfriendly, often rude, and closed to

different cultures” (Russell, 2005: 73). These prejudgments on the part of international students clearly put up obstacles to relationships and affect openness towards home students (Montgomery, 2010). Additionally, Montgomery (2010) found that home students tend not to make the first move in conversing with international students; they prefer to wait for their counterparts to come to them.

Another barrier to integration is the drinking culture (Kinnell, 1990; Mori, 2006; Harrison and Peacock, 2007; Montgomery, 2010). The drinking culture in British society is reported to have highly significant effects in terms of encouraging people to be more sociable and friendly. One student in a study by Montgomery (2010: 90) believed that “going to the pub is a prerequisite if more sociable relationships are to be developed with home students”. However, this habit may not be familiar to international students and the latter have commented negatively about the prevalence of a drinking culture in relation to friendship (Merrick, 2004; Montgomery, 2010).

Merrick (2004: 67) explains that “Students who had participated in any type of activity on campus (e.g. joining the clubs or societies, doing sport, drama, music, or volunteering) were more likely to have UK friends than those who had not”. This makes it clear that taking part in activities outside the classroom increases the likelihood of relationships forming between international students and their local neighbours. Merrick (2004) found that 30% of international students had not been involved in such activities but Merrick, (2004) failed to track the reasons why international students did not join in with such activities.

International students have a tendency to join with people of the same nationality (co-national network) (Bochner, McLeod and Lin, 1977; Valet and Ang, 1998; Ward and Masgoret, 2004). Evidence from Montgomery (2009) suggests that international students have a desire to stay or work in groups with their own people because having the same cultural background facilitates communication and makes group work easier. Valet and Ang (1998) add that a benefit of co-national networks is that working with people with similar cultural backgrounds or languages will minimize conflicts and misunderstandings. This is favourable for both international and local students (Valet and Ang, 1998;

Montgomery, 2009). Additionally, Ward and Masgoret (2004) confirm the benefits of co-national networks as a valuable source for international students in that they provide an important source of social support to meet emotional needs, for example, when international students are upset, lonely or having relationship problems.

As well as having these co-national relationships, international students have also been reported as being more closely integrated with international students from other countries than with local students (Merrick, 2004; Ward and Masgoret, 2004; Montgomery, 2010). McDowell and Montgomery (2009) indicate benefits of international student networks: academic support and psychological encouragement. Due to the fact that international students move to host countries for their education, they are all in a new social context and share some of the feelings of others who have come from overseas, as well as interests and other common factors. Together, these elements lead to friendships in a network of international students who offer each other social capital and support each other academically, socially and, to a certain extent, emotionally (Montgomery, 2010).

2.4 Students' Decision Making

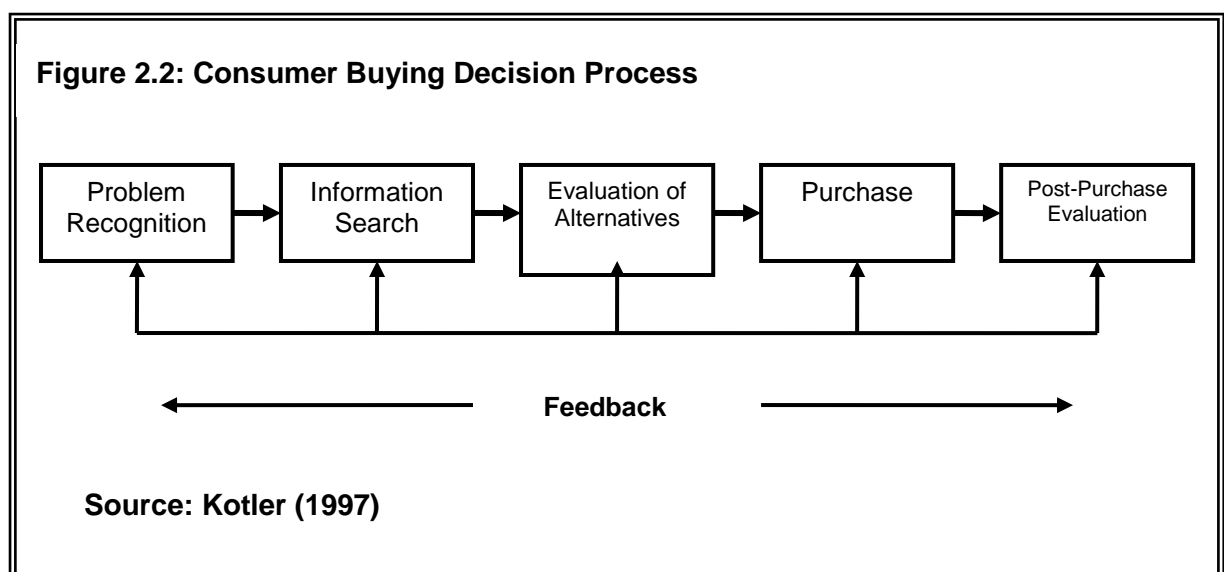
2.4.1 The Decision-Making Process

Education is categorized within the service sector; it includes all of the following: intangibility, inseparability of production and consumption, heterogeneity and perishability (Zeithaml et al., 1985). Universities marketing their courses should focus more on how to induce their prospective students to select them and, therefore, an understanding of students' decision-making processes and related factors would be fruitful.

Researchers have studied consumer decision making since the 1950s (Sirikaya and Woodside, 2005). The EKB model has been widely used in the consumer decision-making process literature (Pimpa, 2002a). It was developed in 1973 by Engel, Kollat and Blackwell. It focuses on both products and services for crucial decisions (Athiyaman, 1997). Moreover, "the EKB Model assumes that a

consumer's decision processing is a consecutive processing which leads to solving problems, and which features considering decision processing as the center of combining interactions of relevant outside and inside elements" (Lin and Chen, 2006: 251). This model was revised in 1986 by Engel, Blackwell and Miniard as the EBM model (Jones, 2006).

Another general sequential consumer buying-decision-process model which is widely used in higher education is the Kotler Model (Moogan, Baron, and Harris, 1999; Moogan, Baron, and Bainbridge, 2001; Moogan and Baron, 2003). This model provides a basic five-stage process which can be a useful framework for understanding how students make their decisions about higher education (Moogan et al., 2001). This model is outlined in Figure 2.2. Moogan and Baron (2003) have noted that, although this model is generic, "it will permit complex behavior to be examined into meaningful parts so allowing for the accommodation of individual/product and market variation in the analysis" (p. 272).



As can be seen, the student decision-making process starts with problem recognition and finishes with post-purchase evaluation. Students tend to search for as much information as they can, then evaluate many alternative choices before making a decision. One characteristic of higher education, intangibility, is usually connected to high risk levels by consumers (Cubillo et al., 2006). The risk of making a wrong decision can be costly as the duration of study may

exceed a year and students cannot assess a class before making a decision. Additionally, course fees are high and have to be paid even though students may leave at any stage (Moogan et al., 2001; Kotler and Fox, 1995). After making a decision and enrolling in an institution, students will evaluate whether or not they are satisfied with it.

Problem Recognition

This is the stage where international students become aware that they wish to go to university. A variety of factors are involved in this stage and make going to university is important to them. For example, students may consider their prospective careers, or be trying to meet the expectations of parents or family (Kotler and Fox, 1995). Students, both undergraduate and postgraduate, may perceive overseas courses as better than the courses in their home countries or they may not gain entry into local institutes (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). Many students may seek self-transformative investments in overseas education (Pyvis and Chapman, 2007). In any case, their evaluation may be that going to university is not attractive to them, so they might seek employment or take a year to travel instead (Moogan et al., 2001).

Information Search

At this stage, students gather data on universities from many sources. They can get information internally from within their memory and/or externally from outside (Moogan et al., 2001). Pimpa (2005), in his research into family influences on undergraduate, master's and doctoral Thai students' international education choices, found that Thai students obtained information from family members who had experienced studying in Australia regarding the country and city of their intended destination before making their decision. Furthermore, according by Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), alumni, friends and relative are in the first rank of promotional strategies in relation to international students in the UK higher education system. Mazzarol (1998) claims that advertising and promotion, and the use of private agencies, are 2 out of 17 success factors that are critical for education institutions seeking to market themselves internationally. At this stage, it is also important for higher education institutes to put effort into communicating with potential students, so as to be a good source of information. This information includes written material, campus visits,

admission/recruiting (Chapman, 1981), pamphlets, school counsellors and college representatives (Isherwood, 1991), and the internet (Gray et al., 2003; Cheung et al., 2011).

Evaluation of Alternatives

After gathering information from many sources, students form a clear picture of the choice of institutes (Kotler and Fox, 1995); they then compare the options and information they have gathered from the search process (McCall, Trombetta and Nattrass, 2002). At this stage, university characteristics such as tuition fees, reputation, course curriculum, graduate job prospects, image and ranking may be involved. Location is also an important factor when students evaluate their choices. Heap (2001) argues that it is reasonable for students to visit the institute that they are going to spend the next three or four years in if they want to ensure they make the right choice. A study by Moogan et al. (2001) suggests that before students attend an open day they consider course content to be the most important attribute; however, after such open days they make location the most considerable attribute. This shows that visiting a location on an open day may help students make up their minds. As a result, universities should aim at presenting open days that are well-organized, informative and pleasurable day in order to help students (and their parents) make their decisions more easily (Moogan et al., 2001).

Purchase

At this stage the student will make a decision for the optimal university in which they would like to study. Influencers such as friends, alumni or parents may be involved in the decision at this stage (Pimpa, 2002a; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002).

Post-Purchase Evaluation

After beginning to attend a university, students will have a perception of the service performance of university which they will compare with their expectations. If the discrepancy between service performance and expectation is wide, students will become dissatisfied with their choice of university. In contrast, if the gap is narrow, they will express satisfaction. If the former is the

case, this will influence students' behaviour (Kotler and Fox, 1995). They may leave the university prematurely, not recommend the institution to others or go back to the information search stage if they want to move to another institute in the near future.

In addition to the Kotler Model, another beneficiary model related to the decision-making process is that produced by Chapman. Chapman (1981) highlights a model of student college choice which presents the variables influencing students' college choices. He explains that college choices are influenced by a combination of student characteristics and external influences. Student characteristics include socioeconomic status, aptitude, educational aspiration and high school performance. External influences are significant persons (such as friends, parents or high school personnel), fixed college characteristics (cost, location, availability of programmes), and college efforts to communicate with students (by means of written information, campus visits and admission/recruitment). Student characteristics and external influences will together create general expectations of college life in a particular institution (Isherwood, 1991) which lead to a choice of college. A student can select a first choice by applying for the first institution and then the second institution and so on.

The final decision-making model is the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Li, Mizarski, Lee and Liu (2009) and Chen and Zimitat (2006) have applied the TPB model to consumer behavioural intention studies, pioneered by Ajzen and Fishbein (1975), to decision making in higher education in the Chinese context. According to Chen and Zimitat (2006: 93), TPB is based on "the principle that to understand an individual's choice of behavior it is essential to examine their intentions related to that behavior". In TPB, attitudes towards a service or product are categorized into three major groups in order to facilitate understanding and enhance predictions of behaviour: the attitude towards the behaviour (AB), subjective norms (SN) and perceived behaviour control (PBC). AB refers to individuals' negative or positive beliefs about a particular behaviour; for example, the attitude towards the quality of overseas education. It can be the outcome of an individual perception associated with that belief. SN is the outcome of behaviour under the influence or pressure of others in society,

including peers, parents, close friends etc. PBC refers to the availability of resources or factors that make particular behaviour easy, e.g. financial resources. The TPB model has been used in higher education by Chen and Zimitat (2006) to analyse the Taiwanese high school students' motivations to undertake overseas study in either Australia or the US. They found that Taiwanese students were influenced to study in Australia because of AB, mainly due to the safety factor, which gave Australia an edge over the US. The greatest influence on studying in the US was SN, which mostly came from family and peer influences.

2.4.2 Factors Related to International Students' Decision-Making Processes

To provide a framework for understanding students' decision making about overseas higher education, it is fruitful to look back to previous studies on factors that influence students' decision making. Table 2.6 gives a summary overview of literature from various studies of international education focused on factors influencing the decision-making process. These studies have been conducted by different researchers in different leading exporting education countries, including the UK, the US and Australia.

Table 2.6: Major Factors Related to Decision Making

	Proximity	Climate	Education Quality/ Reputation	Safety	Career Opportunity	Friends' Recommendations	Course	Cost	Language	Agents	Migration Opportunity	Location	Duration	Family	Knowledge of host country	Political issues at home
Lawley and Perry, 1998	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		
Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	✓	
Cubillo et al., 2006	✓		✓				✓	✓								
Chapman, 1981	✓					✓	✓					✓		✓		
Danglish and Chan, 2005		✓														
Chapman and Pyvis, 2006														✓		
Pyvis and Chapman, 2007			✓		✓						✓					
Lord and Dawson, 2002	✓	✓				✓			✓							
Yang, 2007		✓	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓					
Maringe and Carter, 2007			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				✓		✓
Maringe, 2006			✓		✓	✓	✓	✓								
Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003			✓	✓	✓			✓								
Kinnell, 1989		✓	✓				✓	✓								
Ho and Hung, 2008			✓				✓									
Chen and Zimitat, 2006			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓					✓	✓		
Isherwood, 1991			✓			✓		✓				✓		✓		
Moogan et al., 1999			✓		✓	✓	✓					✓				
Moogan et al., 2001			✓				✓	✓				✓				
Li et al., 2009				✓		✓	✓	✓						✓		
Pimpa, 2002a						✓		✓		✓				✓		
Pimpa, 2003					✓									✓		
Pimpa, 2005														✓		
Ivy, 2008							✓	✓		✓						
Russell, 2005									✓							
Ward and Masgoret, 2004										✓						
Forbes-Mewett et al., 2010				✓												
Mazzarol et al., 1997	✓	✓			✓			✓						✓	✓	
Daily et al., 2010		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓						✓		
Lu et al., 2009					✓				✓					✓		
Findley et al., 2010			✓		✓		✓	✓			✓			✓		

Source: Author

Looking at Table 2.6, it can be seen that a variety of factors involve students' decision making, for example, education quality, future career prospect, recommendation from family and friends, course and cost of study. Much literature has been focused on the decision-making processes of Asian students in Australia, where proximity and climate are important (Lawley and Perry, 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002); however, these factors may be weak predictors in the UK context.

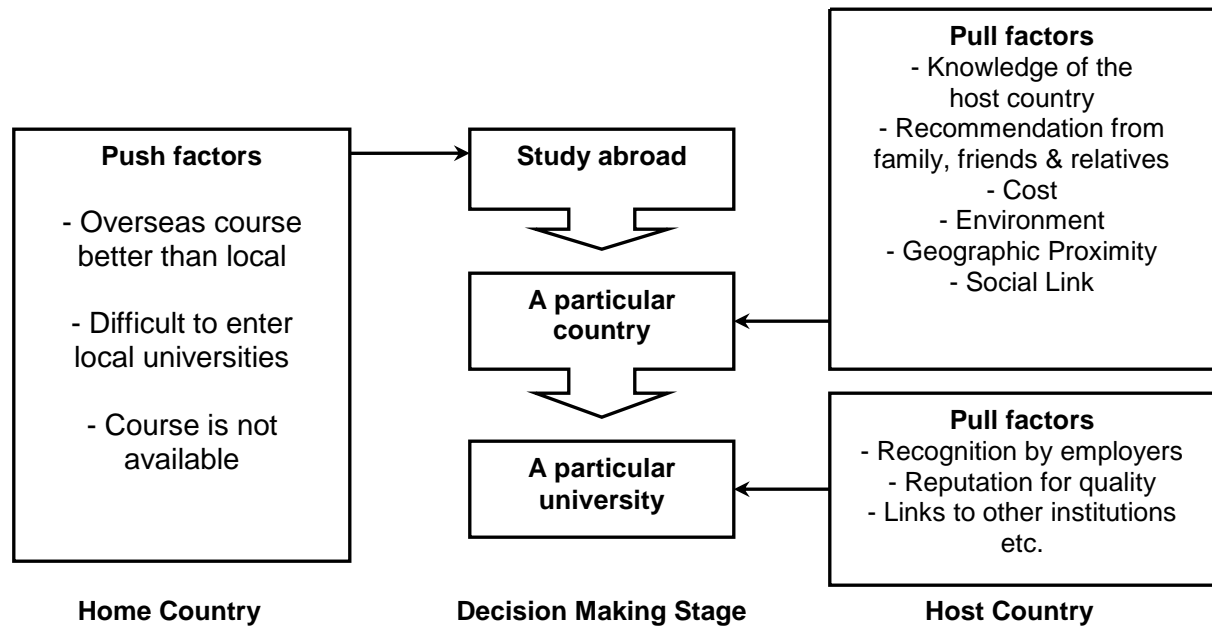
It also found that there is a weakness in the methodologies of the previous studies in that many of them have relied heavily on either interviews or questionnaires, which cannot give full insight (Chapman, 1981; Moogan et al., 2001; Pimpa, 2003; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Chen and Zimitat, 2006; Pyvis and Chapman, 2007). To overcome this limitation, it is suggested that both interviews and questionnaires should be undertaken in order to gain a wider picture and more insight. Furthermore, only few researchers have focused on the effects of country characteristics (e.g. Lawley and Perry, 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Cubillo et al., 2006; Pimpa, 2003) and the higher education characteristics (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2003; Cubillo et al., 2006) of the host country.

2.4.2.1 Push-Pull Factors

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) completed a study of the global pattern of international student flows. In their study, push-pull factors were combined to explain the destination choices of undergraduate and postgraduate students choosing to study overseas. Push factors operate when students make a decision to undertake international education, while pull factors are involved when students choose a destination country and an institution (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). Pimpa (2002a: 57) states that "push and pull factors help in identifying the reasons underlying the flows of international students".

Mazzarol and Soutar's model is presented in Figure 2.3. The decision process undergone when students seek an international education institution overseas has been categorized into three distinct stages: the decision to go abroad, the decision to go to a particular country and the decision to go to a particular institution.

Figure 2.3: Push-Pull Factors Model



Source: Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)

In the first stage, when students decide to study in another country they are influenced by push factors at home. These push factors may be, for example, overseas courses being better than local ones, finding it difficult to gain entry to universities in their home country, a course not being available locally, a wish to acquire a better understanding of the West or a desire to migrate.

Once a student has decided to leave, the next stage is the selection of a host country. Pull factors within a particular country become important in making one country more attractive than others. There are six pull factors at this stage. The first is knowledge and awareness of the host country. This is related to how information on a host country can be accessed by prospective students and the knowledge that a students have of a particular country. The quality of education in the host country and recognition of its qualifications in the home country are also included in the knowledge and awareness factor. The second factor is recommendations from

family and friends. Word-of-mouth is regarded as one of the most powerful promotional tools in international education. Students are likely to get recommendations from parents and other relatives who have graduated from a particular country. It should be noted that factors such as recommendations from family have been found in many studies regarding international students from Asian countries where the family has an important role in children's decision making; for example, Pimpa (2002a, 2003, 2005) and Chen and Zimitat (2006). This factor also includes recommendations from agents but these are less powerful than parents' and other relatives' recommendations (Pimpa, 2002b). The cost issue is the third factor. Students consider tuition fees, the cost of living and the opportunity to find a part-time job while studying overseas.

The fourth factor is the environment. In this factor, students will consider whether the climate in the host country is comfortable and the campus environment attractive. The two final factors are social links and geographic proximity. Students are more likely to go to a particular country if they have friends or relatives living or studying there. In some cases, students may select to study in a country which is in close proximity to their home country.

The final stage is making a decision to study in a particular institute. The factors included in this last stage, such as an institution's reputation for quality, its market profile, course range, links to other institutions, offshore teaching programmes and staff expertise, are pull factors which make one institute more attractive than others. However, among the factors in this stage, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) highlight qualifications being recognised by employers as the most important.

A study by Tarry (2008) into the reasons behind Thai students choosing to study in UK universities adapted the push-pull model. This was a case study of six Thai students who graduated bachelor's and master's degree in the UK and found different factors from those of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). He found that the main push factor for these students and their parents was a lack of confidence in the Thai education system. The pull factors were stronger than the push factors and included 1) the opportunity to improve English skills, 2) overseas experiences, 3)

gaining increased status from obtaining a recognized qualification, 4) university reputations and 5) economic capital. In contrast, an application of the push-pull model to the Chinese context by Yang (2007) found similar factors to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). For example, overseas courses being seen as better and difficulties in gaining entry to higher education in China were the most important factors in choosing overseas education for Chinese students. He also found that educational quality and future migration opportunities are the most important factors in selecting Australia as a particular country.

The push-pull model indicates that push factors from home countries and enticement factors from host countries together shape an important framework for understanding the influences that motivate international students' decisions for international education (Pimpa, 2002a). However, Pimpa (2002a) has criticized the push and pull factor model because it focuses only three choices relating to international education: the decision to study abroad, choice of country and choice of university. The selections of courses and of city, which are equally important factors for international students, were ignored. Another weakness of the model is it does not address social factors such as changes in social status or social mobility arising from overseas education, which are important in some Asian countries, including Thailand. However, as shown by Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) research in Taiwan, India, Indonesia and China, this importance may arise from them having been colonised by a western country in the past.

2.4.2.2 Familial influence

In much research in students' decision making, parents are cited as a relevant issue for students in higher education (e.g. Chapman, 1981; Isherwood, 1991; Chapman and Pyvis, 2006; Li et al., 2009). There is a belief that "family members have the ability to shape behavior and lifestyle, influence self concept, and contribute to the formation of values and attitudes" (Pimpa, 2005: 433).

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002: 88) claim that "The decision to study abroad is frequently a family decision that involves several decision makers. Parental

influence is particularly strong among undergraduate students when they are choosing a destination country". Parents and other relatives who have experienced a particular institution have been reported as an important influencing factor motivating students' destination choices (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2005).

Pimpa (2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2005), in his study of family influences on Thai students' decisions to study overseas, claims that there are five choices in students' decision making rather than the three choices in Mazzarol and Soutar's model (see Figure 2.3 on the push-pull model). These five choices are the decision to study abroad, the choice of country, the choice of city, the choice of course and the choice of university. Further, Pimpa (2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2005) found that, within these five choices, Thai students could be influenced by five familial influences: finance, expectations, competition, persuasion and information. Among these five factors, finance influence was reported to be the strongest.

In addition to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) and Pimpa (2002a, 2002b, 2003, 2005), the study carried out by Lawley and Perry (1998) also confirms that the opinion of the family is considered an important factor influencing overseas destination choices by Thai and Malaysian students, especially in families in which the parents have studied overseas. In addition, in research by Coleman (2004) into Middle Eastern country support for Arabs and Iranians the recommendations/opinions of family were very important as 61 per cent of students in all destinations were influenced by their parents, other relatives and friends, with the most powerful influence being parents

2.4.2.3 The role of educational agencies

When it comes to marketing higher education to the international market, education agencies play an important role in assisting a particular university or government to promote its education. The British Council (2010a) highlights the fact that research on students' decision-making processes shows that "approximately 41 per cent of prospective international students had or planned to use the services of an agent"

(p.16). Maringe and Carter (2007) found that educational agencies (e.g. informal agencies, British Council) were one of influential factors for African students choosing UK higher education. Similarly to the UK results, a study in New Zealand found that more than seventy per cent of its sample had used agents to help them decide where to study in New Zealand (Ward and Masgoret, 2004). A research study of international Chinese undergraduate students in US higher education was also reported that around 60% of them used an agent to help them with application to the US institutions (Zhang, 2011). Pimpa (2002a: 78) concludes as follows on the role of education agents for Australian education in Thailand:

The major functions of today's education agents are to recruit international students to Australian institutions, to provide information and services related to international education (i.e. information on academic institutions and programs, visa applications, accommodation services, and relevant official procedures).

His conclusion shows that education agencies are a one-stop service where a prospective student who seeks overseas education can obtain information relating to countries, universities, courses or even life overseas. Although the study was conducted among Thai students at an Australian university, similar conclusions could be applied to international students in other countries as most agencies offer their services to institutes from many countries (Pimpa, 2002a).

Furthermore, Pimpa (2002b) purports that the most detailed information that students gained from educational agencies related to course outlines, subject details and course structures. The students stated that the information they received from the education agencies was up-to-date and reliable. However, the agencies' influence was less powerful than that of their friends as it was realized that these agencies were commercial operations (Pimpa, 2002b). On this point, the results of Robison's study (2007) suggest that students have to be aware of ethical considerations when they would use commercial agencies as she found that some agents did not give students true information. For example, one of her respondents commented that:

He didn't tell properly about the fees, about the—what do you say that? tuition fees. He told me something else about the tuition fees...he didn't tell exact amount. And yeah, and because of that I am having problem to now. And I have to order money from home because I brought a particular, I had a particular amount with me...but now it's like it's kind of headache for money, yeah (Robison, 2007: 134).

This is consistent with the research conducted in China by Yang (2007). In China, educational agencies were reported to be the least important influential factor for Chinese students who chose Australia as their study destination, and they played a less important role in Chinese students' decision making due to "their diminishing credibility" (Yang, 2007: 9).

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) also confirm the important of educational agencies because they found that private education agents motivate students to select their destination country, especially for students from Indonesia. Another study by Mazzarol (1998), on international students in Australia, confirmed that agencies are an important source of information. Furthermore, in the Education UK Marketing Plan 2008/2009 by the British Council, it was mentioned that, in order to strengthen relationships and networks and support long-term market development, strong relationships should be maintained with agencies (British Council, 2009b). A year later, the British Council (2010b) highlighted the importance of partnerships with education agencies as part of the Prime Minister's Initiative for International Education (PMI2). During 2008/2009, the British Council provided online training for more than 2,000 registered agents supported by the PMI2 project as it believes that "Agents can provide a high level of customer care to make sure that students considering the UK are provided with the most appropriate advice, information and support" (British Council, 2010a: 16).

However, according to Ross, Heaney and Cooper (2007) and Robison (2007), research on educational agencies recruiting international students is limited. To the best knowledge of the researcher, research on educational agencies primarily

focuses on Australian universities rather than the UK perspective (e.g. Pimpa, 2002b).

For the UK, there are 119 private educational agencies in Bangkok such as Brilliant Life, Educate Park, Hands-On, Hamilton International etc. (British Council, 2013).

Beyond the students, education agencies also bring benefits to host institutions. According to Stedman (1999 cited in Robison, 2007: 60), the benefits for institution are that “Since extensive travelling to a variety of other nations for the purposes of recruiting is cost-prohibitive, using agents to promote academic programs saves the institution considerable money, and, consequently, helps the institution maintain a healthier balance in term of diversity in its international student population”

2.5 Education in Thailand

As mentioned in Chapter 1, the number of Thai students leaving their home country for overseas education has increased. It grew by a fifth from 1999 to 2002. By 2011, according to the United Nations, approximately 26,018 Thai students were studying abroad (UIS, 2012b). The UK is the second-most popular destination for these students (British Council, 2009). Furthermore, Thais do not have confidence in their local universities’ postgraduate degrees and they have a belief that overseas education gives superior qualifications to local ones (Tarry, 2008). This series of factors makes research into Thai students studying overseas, especially in the UK, of interest.

Below, information is given on the history of foreign education in Thailand, factors that influence people’s decisions to study abroad and the long relationship of Thai students to UK higher education. The aim of this is to provide substantial information as a starting point of the research in this country. In particular, it also highlights the relationship between overseas education and social standing in Thailand.

2.5.1 Education in Thailand before 1868 (Before King Rama V's era)

Before 1868, education in Thailand was limited to small group of people. Visissobha (1979) highlights the fact that it was available only for people in the palace, such as the royal family and the royal clan. For ordinary people, education was available in Buddhist temples from monks - but only for men. Women had fewer chances for education.

In the Kingdom of Ayuttaya in King Narai Maharaja's era, Thailand started bi-lateral relationships and trading with foreign countries including Spain, Holland, England and France. The main objectives were selling, buying and doing business with these foreign countries. Foreign technologies, languages, educations and religions were transferred to Thailand and its society at that time. Western education was also set up at that time by groups of French missionaries who aimed to spread Christianity in Thailand (Rujiwiwattanakul, 1990). After King Narai Maharaja's era, the later kings of the Kingdom of Ayutthaya did not please the European foreigners. Therefore the relationships with foreign countries were not as close as in King Narai Maharaja's era. The missionaries did not get support from the palace and found it very difficult to achieve their aims. As a consequence, western education was stopped (Amarinratana, 1979).

Bi-lateral relationships and trading were re-built in the Rattanakosin Kingdom after the colonial period was expanded. Thailand was forced to sign the Bernie Treaty with the British Empire in King Rama III's era. After this treaty, diplomatic relationships between Thailand and western countries were established, as well as western education coming in and transforming the country (Amarinratana, 1979)., There is evidence that the first Thai student sent to study in a foreign country was Mr. Choon, in the era of King Rama III of the Rattanakosin Kingdom. He was sent to study sea ship piloting in the UK. After he was awarded a certificate in this, he came back to Thailand in King Rama IV's era and become "Khun Jonjanjadtalae"²; later, he became "Pra Chonlathanpinij"³, in King Rama V's era (Amarinratana, 1979). Rujiwiwattanakul (1990) states that there was much acquisition and

² His title clearly express his ability in navigating the world's water- ways

³ Higher position but also shows his expertise in waterways

expansion of colonies in neighbouring countries such as Burma and Vietnam in King Rama IV's era; thus, the king realized that modernization, westernization and revolutionising education in the country would save it from colonial domination by western powers. English and western knowledge would be key weapons for understanding what was behind western thought and he was also convinced that "his country would benefit from cultural and commercial contact with the West" (Ingram, 1955: 6). Therefore, after he took the throne, he supported his sons, daughters and the wider royal family in getting western education by setting up a school in the palace and hiring British teachers for it (Amarinratana, 1979; Rujiwiwattanakul, 1990). His vision was to be ready to face the new environment brought about by colonial powers (Rujiwiwattanakul, 1990). Amarinratana (1979) adds that, in this era, western education was growing very fast and not just for royalty but also for ordinary people. Evidence suggests that groups of Thai students were sent to study abroad in 1857. Some of these groups were sent in accordance with King Rama IV's vision of preparedness for governmental duties in the near future, and some were sent by their families (Amarinratana, 1979; Rujiwiwattanakul, 1990).

2.5.2 Education in Thailand after 1868 (King Rama V's era)

In King Rama V's era, Thailand was faced with political spreading and the arrival of western invaders. Thailand lost some of its territories when it regained sovereignty (Ingram, 1955). As the first king who had received a full western education, King Rama V was convinced that making the country ready for modernization and westernization was important, especially in terms of changing education, in order to save it from western powers (Amarinratana, 1979 and Somboon, 1991).

He stated that education would be equally accessible to all Thai people "...The royal family since my sons and my daughters until the lowest level of ordinary Thai would have equally opportunity to get education..." (Somboon, 1991: 41). From his quote, it is clear that a formal education system was being established in Thailand. Proper curriculums and schools were gradually set up for formal education. He supported the idea of providing western education as he believed that it was

fundamental to the arts and sciences. It is considered that the education revolution became a clearly modernized system in King Rama V's era (Somboon, 1991).

2.5.3 Factors Influencing Choosing Education in Foreign Countries

The factors that supported choosing foreign education in King Rama V's era are summarized as follows (Moolsin, 2003; Somboon, 1991):

- Colonial acquisitions by western powers.
- Human resource requirements for government officers.
- King Rama V's overseas' experience.

2.5.3.1. Colonial Acquisitions by Western Powers

As mentioned earlier, western powers made large acquisitions in South East Asia - Britain acquired Burma, France acquired Cambodia and Vietnam - because they claimed that white people had a moral duty to make the people of Asia civilised. This was referred to as 'The Whiteman's burden' (Amarinratana, 1979). When these intrusions approached Thailand, they automatically pushed Thailand towards welcoming an inevitable western intrusion into the country in King Rama IV's era. To save the country from colonial domination, forcing modernization and westernization in the country was prioritized. To become a modernized and westernized nation, the country required a national revolution in every weak area, including education.

At the beginning of the national revolution it was necessary to learn the western administrative style. At that time, Thai officers were not yet ready for this. Hence, foreign officers were hired as assistants in many government departments (Visissobha, 1979). Thai government officers received on-the-job training from these foreigners. Therefore, King Rama V realized that the nation was not safe enough to stand on foreigners' feet. The persons he trusted most at that time were his brothers and his sons. This group of people was expected to gain an excellent education as in the future one of them would succeed to his throne. Thai education, however, was not well-developed, as evidenced in royal letter:

“Although how good the education in our country, it does not as good as studying in overseas” (Somboon, 1991). Therefore, he sent all of his sons to study abroad in order to give them a faster world-class education (Visissobha, 1979).

2.5.3.2 Human Resource Requirements

King Rama V established 12 ministries in the revolutionary era. This led to high demand for both executives and officers in these ministries but there was a limited availability of people because education was only open to royalty, upper class government officers' families and elites. Hiring foreign officers as government assistants was only a short-term solution. Therefore, King Rama V became convinced that human resource development for education was a worthwhile investment for the country (Visissobha, 1979). Somboon (1991) states that the king certainly planned to prepare human resources for government duties in the future and hoped that the next generation would have better education than his generation in order to have educated people to help him. Thus his statement, “Although how good the education in our country, it does not as good as studying in overseas” (Somboon, 1991). The first group of 20 Thai students was sent to Singapore in 1871 and later 3 of these students were sent to England in the same year (Rujiwiwattanakul, 1990). Somboon (1991) claims that this group of students was selected from among the children of the ‘Puu Dee’.⁴ There is also evidence that in 1885 the four eldest sons of King Rama V, namely Prince Kitiyakara, Prince Rabi Pattanasak, Prince Pravitra and Prince Chirapravati, were sent to study in the UK (Picture 1.1) (Amarinratana, 1979; BhiromPakdi, 2002) and the rest of the princes were sent for overseas education later (Visissobha, 1979). After returning to their home country it was clear that these princes were motivated to help manage their father's duties. For example, Prince Rabi Pattanasak, who studied law at Oxford University, returned to Thailand in 1896 full of knowledge and inspiration to modernize Thailand's ancient laws. The prince became the Minister of Justice in the same year (Visissobha, 1979; Rujiwiwattanakul, 1990).

⁴ People from upper class backgrounds who were rich, powerful in Thai society, usually from the aristocratic and royal families



Picture 1.1: The Four Eldest Princes Sent to Study Abroad

From left to right - Prince Rabi (10), Prince Pravitra (10), Prince Kitiyakara (11) and Prince Chirapravati (9)

Source: BhiromPakdi (2002)

2.5.3.3. King Rama V's Overseas Experience

Somboon (1991) states that diplomatic visits overseas by King Rama V to both Europe and Asia enabled him to realize how other countries had developed, especially in terms of education, leading to him later rearranging education in Thailand so that it was up-to-date with world situations and the Thai lifestyle. For example, after visiting Singapore King Rama V planned to set up an English school for the royals in the Royal Palace as he found, on his trip, that not being able to speak English caused problems (DamrongRajanupab, 1974).

The first European visit in 1897 aimed to form close friendships with superpowers including Russia and Germany. Somboon (1991) claims that King Rama V hoped that close relationships with superpowers might prevent France from invading Thailand. However, the clearest benefit from his overseas visits was the models of educational administration he gained from those countries (Somboon, 1991). Later, he sent one of his favourite sons, Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanadh, to be educated in Russia, and Prince Rangsit Prayurasakdi was sent to Germany (Somboon, 1991). Sinlarat, Bowonsiri, Achawadamrong and Polsarum (2007) add that King Rama V researched information on educational administration in those countries he visited in order to adapt them to the Thai environment. Evidence suggests that after the first European visit in 1898 he asked Phraya Visutsuriyasak,

Thailand's ambassador to the UK, to report on the proposal "Opinion on the Educational Management of Siam Students in England" (Moolsin, 1973). After being satisfied with the proposal, the King's Scholarship was established according to King Rama V's vision and aimed to subsidize ordinary Thai students so that they could undertake overseas education. Therefore, the selection of students for overseas education has been a systematic process up to the present (Rujiwiwattanakul, 1990). Rujiwiwattanakul (1990) adds that there was also another kind of scholarship, called 'the Royal Thai Government Scholarship' established in King Rama V's era. This offers overseas scholarships to meet urgent human resource requirements for government departments; for example, scholarships from the Royal Forest Department and the Royal Rail Department.

2.5.4 Foreign Education as a Means of Social Mobility

After the two types of scholarship mentioned above were established, Thai students had more opportunities to gain an overseas education. Evidence from a study by Rujiwiwattanakul (1990) found that many students who got scholarships from these schemes returned to Thailand full of knowledge and worked for government departments to the satisfaction of their sponsors; for example, in the Royal Forest Department or the Royal Rail Department. Additionally, in the Ministry of Justice, a number of law graduates from overseas had managed to modernize Thai law and rearrange extraterritorial rights (Rujiwiwattanakul, 1990). From his book "Glaii-Bann", it is clear that King Rama V was highly satisfied with those Thai students who graduated in military studies and returned to Thailand and worked as lecturers in the Thai military school (King Rama V, 1970).

All of these results could be contributors to the creation of a later Thai social value. Sinlarat et al. (2007) illustrate that in Thai society there is a belief that overseas graduates have higher knowledge and qualifications than Thai students who have been educated in Thailand, and they have better chance of being promoted in the workplace. A study by Visissobha (1979) interviewed 24 persons who were awarded the king's scholarship between 1910 and 1932. She categorized these persons into three groups: upper-class families, upper-middle-class families and

lower-middle-class families. She found that family background was not important because all the interviewees from all backgrounds had upward social mobility through their work ability as a result of having been educated abroad. When comparing these bureaucrats with their friends who do not have foreign degrees, it becomes clear that those who study overseas have a higher social status and are more socially acceptable than those who do not have foreign degrees (Visissobha, 1979). This evidence confirms the idea that foreign education is a tool for increasing social status among the Thai people.

Another important reason for this emphasis on social value is all the sons of King Rama V and many other royals and aristocrats at that time were sent to study overseas. This group of people was regarded as very upper class, or 'Puu Dee'. Since then, the concept of 'Puu Dee' has been changed in that people who have a good education from overseas can move upwards into the 'Puu Dee' social class (National Archive of Thailand, Tor 49/7).

2.5.5 The Sending of Thai Princes Overseas/to England

In the colonization period, when Thailand was influenced by European powers, King Rama V noted that increasing civilization in the country could be a way to prevent colonial domination by western powers.

As mentioned earlier, all the sons of King Rama V had overseas education as he wished that in the future these princes would help him with his duties (Visissobha, 1979). Visissobha (1979) adds that King Rama V hired foreign teachers to teach his sons and daughters in the royal palace; later, in their early teenage years, King Rama V planned overseas education for each son for two reasons. The first was the urgent requirement for manpower for the country. It was planned that Prince Rabi Pattanasak would study law and Prince Mahidol Adulyadej medicine for this reason (Visissobha, 1979). The second reason involved diplomatic policies towards other powerful countries. This reason became obvious given King Rama V's visit to Germany and Russia in order to enhance Thailand's friendships with them. He was very pleased with the modernization in these two countries and the

hospitality received from both King Nicholas II of Russia and King William II of Germany. After his return to Thailand, he decided to send one of his favourite sons, Prince Chakrabongse Bhuvanadh, to Russia for military studies and Prince Rangsit Prayurasakdi to study education and health care in Germany (Visissobha, 1979; Somboon, 1991).

Visissobha (1979) claims that at the beginning of this period of overseas education all the princes were sent to England for preliminary studies before appropriate subjects and countries were selected. British families were carefully selected as hosts for the princes in order to familiar them with English conventions. Then the princes were sent to famous schools in the UK; for example, Eton College and Harrow School (Visissobha, 1979; National Archive of Thailand, Tor 49/7).

The number of the princes who went through this process cannot be confirmed in this thesis as Amarinratana's study (1979) claimed that nineteen were sent overseas but Rujiwiwattanakul's study (1990) claims that only seventeen princes were reported as having overseas education. After their return to Thailand, however, they become part of the new wave of modernization in the country.

2.5.6 Influences of UK Education on Thailand

As mentioned in the earlier section, at least seventeen princes were sent to England for basic education in the time of King Rama V before moving on to appropriate areas of study in the UK, Russia, Germany or the US. Visissobha (1979) gives three main reasons why the UK was King Rama V's favourite country for his children.

Firstly, England was a very powerful country in the colonial period. Thailand was dependent on England at that time and sending the princes enhanced the relationship between the two countries. Secondly, English is an international language that is used for communication in many countries worldwide. Being able to speak English fluently enables one to connect not only to England but also to other countries. Finally, England has long-established traditional cultures and

practices; it is a democratic country under monarchical system which is similar to Thailand's. King Rama V did not favour having the princes educated in republican countries such as France.

Evidence shows that eleven out of seventeen princes were educated in England to bachelor degree level. Specifically, King Rama V planned that Crown Prince Mahavajiravuth (later King Rama VI) would have the best education in England in order to prepare for taking the throne after his father. Therefore, the quality of British education was recognized in Thai minds because it was given to the Thai princes.

Evidence from Visissobha (1979) indicates that King Rama VI (Crown Prince Mahavajiravuth) set up a British-style public school system in Bangkok in 1910, called "Mahadlekluang", after he returned to Thailand after studying in England for 15 years. From that period, influences from British education played an important role in educational development in Thailand. Furthermore, many scholarship students who were sent to study overseas returned to Thailand and worked successfully in many Thai ministries, pleasing King Rama VI. The majority of these students graduated from England (see Table 2.7 and Table 2.8). These people were ambassadors for the quality of British education.

UK graduates have been highly successful in many careers; for example, at least four ex-prime ministers have graduated from the UK. In the education sector, many university presidents and many well-known university lecturers have graduated from the UK. These facts add further support to the idea that UK graduates are highly regarded in Thailand.

The previous literature shows that only a handful of studies have focused on Thai students in higher education overseas and most of these have conducted their research in Australia (e.g. Pimpa, 2003; Jones, 2006). Tarry's (2008) research was conducted with Thai students in the UK universities but his study was limited to the reasons why Thai students study in the UK.

Table 2.7: Thai Students Overseas in 1926

Ministry/ Department	England	France	Denmark	Italy	Russia	Japan	US
Defence	5	7	3	3	1		
Navy			5				
Interior	2						
Foreign Affairs	6		3	2	1	4	
Justice	5	2					3
Finance	12						
Transport	5	3					4
Police	2						
Education	18	1					4
Crown Property	10	5					2
Bureau							
Total	65	18	11	5	2	4	13

Source: Ministry of Education (1926)

Table 2.8: Thai Scholarship Students Overseas, 1921-1923

Country	England	US	France	Italy	Japan	Denmark	Burma
Total	526	129	73	5	14	20	12

Source: Thammasakmontri (1923)

2.5.7 Disadvantages of Studying Overseas

Although overseas education brings many benefits to international students, it may bring some problems once they return to their home countries. Evidence from Amarinratana (1979) indicated that when overseas graduates returned to work in Thailand, there were conflicts of thought between this new generation and the old generation in many government departments. This led to work inefficiencies in King Rama V's era. This conflict clearly obstructed the country's development as the old generation did not accept the ideas and work transformations that the new

generation adopted from their overseas knowledge and experiences. This especially led to political conflicts. Furthermore, Amarinratana (1979) shows the existence of conflicts among the overseas graduates arising from differences in the countries they graduate from. For example, there are differences between UK, French and German graduates, especially in the military sector. Furthermore, these students absorb western culture and exhibit elements of euphoria from their new experiences in their living patterns when they return home. This is particularly the case for those who join groups specifically reserved for overseas graduates.

From a study by Tarry (2008), the disadvantages of studying overseas can be summarized as follows:

- Erosion of their own cultures: this because it affects cultural practices and beliefs.
- Acculturation while attending a university overseas. At this point, Bouchner (1982 cited in Tarry, 2008: 121) also agrees that:

This has become a particular problem for international educational exchange schemes, with countless overseas students unwilling to return home from abroad after completion of their studies because they have become acculturated to the society in which they attend the university

This has led to increased Thai emigration to foreign countries such as Japan, the UK and the US (Chalamwong, 2002).

- Reverse culture shock, which is possible for people who return to their home country after a long time living overseas. For example, Tarry (2008) reported that some students found difficult to readjust to life at home.
- The pattern of family relationships may change from dependency on the family to independence from family members and Thai traditions.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed the existing literature that relates to the main topics in this thesis. This review prepares the theoretical background and shows a gap, which is useful for the thesis. Four themes in the literature were identified during this chapter: higher education marketing, service quality and satisfaction, students' decision making and the Thai background to foreign education background.

The number of international students from all countries is predicted to increase to 7.2 million by 2025. The UK is the second market leader after the US. The growing number of international students is important to the British economy and brings diversity to UK universities. As there is strong competition in the global market, UK universities have developed marketing strategies to persuade international students to choose them, with the support of the British government and in the harmony with the British Council. Marketing concepts taken from the product sector have been adapted for use in the higher education sector. Product, price and promotion were found to be important strategies that could be applied to marketing higher education overseas. University rankings, university names, school brands and university locations were also found to have an effect on higher education marketing.

Although many stakeholders, such as employers, the public, the government and the local community, are regarded as customers of higher education, this thesis regards students as the customers. Given this, it is important for higher education institutes to understand students' perceptions of their institutions' service quality. Any gaps between expectations and perceptions of experiences should be bridged. This is one of this research's objectives. The literature review suggests that research into international students' experiences is limited; hence, the research in this area could be fruitful for higher education institutions.

Since decision making about overseas education is risky for international students, a variety of factors are involved in their decision making. This chapter has explained the theoretical models of decision making. The decision-making process

begins when students realize that going to overseas would have benefits for them (e.g. better prospective careers, meeting family expectations, self-transformation, an alternative when they cannot enter a local institution or finding better courses overseas). It ends once students have gained a real university experience. If they are dissatisfied with the university they may leave it or not recommend it to others. This chapter has also summarized factors which relate to international students' decision making; for example, safety, family/friends' recommendations, cost of study and educational agencies. In the case of the UK, the key reason for international students choosing British universities is the quality their education and their reputation. Also, the previous studies show some weaknesses in methodologies and a lack of focus on social factors in students' decision-making research.

Finally, the chapter has explained the rationale for foreign education in the Thai context. The history of education in Thailand and its educational evolution from the first influence of western education in King Rama IV's era has been highlighted. Three factors were identified as encouraging Thai people to look for education in foreign countries: colonial acquisitions of neighbouring by western powers, the Thai government's human resource requirements and King Rama V's overseas visiting experiences. The UK is regarded as having high-quality education in Thai minds. The factors that move Thai people towards undertaking UK education have also been summarized in this chapter.

Chapter Three

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the rationale for the research methodology used in this thesis. Initially, the purpose of this chapter is to review and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the methodology in the light of the aim and objectives of this thesis. As mentioned earlier, this thesis has five objectives and selecting appropriate research techniques for them helps enhance the outcome of the research. Different groups of sample are used in order to meet the research objectives.

The first section begins with the discussion of three research types: exploratory, descriptive and causal research. The second section justifies the appropriateness of the research approach used in relation to the research objectives. As there are many types of research, it is helpful to examine them with sections focusing on quantitative and qualitative approaches. Then the third section justifies the use of quantitative research. This includes preliminary interviews, research instruments, sampling and sample sizes, the questionnaire design and schedule, and the data analysis carried out for the questionnaire. After the explanation of the quantitative research approach, the next section presents the justification for also using a qualitative approach, i.e. in-depth interviews. Two kinds of interview are conducted to fulfil the objectives of the study. Explanations of each interview type will give a clear picture of the design and execution of each one. Ethical issues are also presented in this section with the purpose of showing that the research is conducted in an ethical way.

3.2 Research Design

Developing an effective research design is important for gathering relevant and accurate data because such a design enables the researcher to develop a framework to answer a specific research problem (McDaniel and Gates, 2001). Chisnall (2001) suggests that developing a research design will affect the success or failure of the research. Therefore an effective research design should comprise a comprehensive plan of how the research is to be conducted, which method will be used, and how the data will be collected and analysed.

Research design can be categorized in various ways. However, a widely used method identifies three types of research design according to the purpose of the research: exploratory, descriptive and causal (McGivern, 2003; Robson, 2002; Chisnall, 2001). All three types will be used in this research.

Exploratory research, as its name implies, it is used to explore or search through a problem or situation to provide more insight and a better understanding of the nature of a problem. It is used when the researcher does not have enough understanding to proceed with the research project (Malhotra, 2010). Therefore, exploratory research is often undertaken at the first stage of research (Chisnall, 2005). It is also used to define terms and concepts; for example, a researcher can ask the respondents to clearly define the 'service quality they have expected'. Whenever the researcher gains insight into the problem, he or she can decide to move on to a specific research question or shift to another direction (Malhotra, 2010). Thus, exploratory study is suitable for qualitative research where a researcher tries to gain an in-depth and rich understanding of the problem setting on a small scale. In business, exploratory research is useful for discovering ideas, especially in new product development (Zikmund and Babin, 2007).

In descriptive research, unlike exploratory research, the researcher has prior knowledge of the problem situation. Thus, descriptive research is pre-planned and structured. It is conducted to describe specific phenomena (Chisnall, 2005). Basically, descriptive research is suitable for describing the characteristics of

variables such as gender, education level, monthly income and behaviours. However, the disadvantage of descriptive research is that it fails to explain the relationships and associations between variables (Chisnall, 2005).

Causal research, the final type, is conducted in an attempt to identify cause and effect relationships (Zikmund and Babin, 2007). Malhotra (2010: 113) suggests that causal research is appropriate for the following purposes:

1. To understand which variables are the causes (independent variables) and which the effects (dependent variables) of a phenomenon
2. To determine the nature of the relationship between the causal variables and the effect to be predicted.

As an example of this, it may be used to identify whether students who have parents or relatives who graduated from a UK university have been influenced by them to come to study in the UK.

This study makes use of a combination of these three research approaches. In particular, it uses descriptive research in order to investigate student characteristics such as gender and age, as well as the frequency of variables. However, without a causal study the cause and effect relationship could not be determined. Therefore, the relationships or associations between independent variables (e.g. general information) and dependent variables (e.g. decision making and marketing factors influencing students' UK university choices) were identified in the study. Finally, it is exploratory in nature because it provides insight into and understanding of the decision-making choices of Thai students studying at UK universities, as well as comparing the initial expectations of Thai students with their actual learning experiences. Furthermore, to get a more balanced picture of the perception of British education among people in higher education in other countries, exploratory research was used in terms of interviewing presidents of Thai universities and senior Thai government officials in order to elicit the richness of the discovered issues. The summary of the research design is presented in Table 3.1, below.

Table 3.1: Research Design

	Objective	Exploratory	Descriptive	Causal
1	To identify the perception of UK higher education among executives in Thailand's higher education	✓		
2	To investigate factors relating to students' decision making regarding studying in the UK	✓	✓	✓
3	To investigate the marketing strategies of UK higher education used in Thailand		✓	✓
4	To investigate the role of educational agencies in Thailand and student satisfaction levels		✓	✓
5	To investigate the expectation - experience gap that current Thai students experience in relation to UK higher education	✓		

Source: Author

From Table 3.1, it can be seen that Objective 1 is to identify the perception of higher education from the view of people in higher education in other countries. Their perceptions of UK higher education, UK graduates and UK competitors will be explored under this objective. For Objective 2, all three types of research design are utilized. Exploratory research is used in that students are interviewed to gain insight into factors influencing their decision to study in the UK. Descriptive and causal research methods are used via a questionnaire for use with Thai students across the UK. The aim is to obtain the frequency levels of factors influencing them to study in the UK and then compare these in terms of social demography (e.g. level of current education). Objectives 3 and 4 use descriptive and causal research. In particular, in Objective 3, agreement level of marketing strategies using in Thailand were identified and later they will be grouped in more manageable factors. Objective 4 identifies the role of the education agencies and the level of student satisfaction with their services. Then the association between the use of the education agencies and social demography (e.g. level of education and friend/family graduated in the UK) is identified. In the final objective, the gap

between the expectations and perception of experiences of students is explored. In this context, it is exploratory in nature.

McGivern (2003:85) states that “A case study is an in-depth investigation of a ‘case’ for exploratory, descriptive or explanatory research purposes, or a combination”. Bryman (2008) also supports the idea that a case study can be a single organization, a single school, a single family, a single person or a single event. Furthermore, sometimes not just one but several case studies are used (McGivern, 2003). It has been claimed that using case studies is particularly valuable when investigating complex situations or events, especially for experimental or survey research, and that they can be used in both qualitative and quantitative research (Bloor and Wood, 2006). Multiple methods, such as interviews, observations, documentary methods and audio or video recording, are often used when collecting data in case studies (Bloor and Wood, 2006). In the current research, Thailand is used as a single case study in order to gain a full in-depth picture of Thai students in UK higher education.

3.3 Research Approaches

This section explains the principal social science research approaches and outlines the approaches used in this study. There are two general methodological approaches to social science research: quantitative research and qualitative research. Each one has different characteristics, as shown in comparison dimensions in Table 3.2, below.

Table 3.2 Qualitative and Quantitative Research

Qualitative Research	Comparison Dimension	Quantitative Research
Discover ideas, used in exploratory research with general objects	Purpose	Test hypotheses or specific research questions
Observe and interpret	Approach	Measure and test
Words, pictures, concepts Detailed and in-depth Idiographic description Context rich High validity, low reliability Statistical inference not possible	Data	Numbers, percentages means, Less detail or depth Nomothetic description Context poor High reliability, low validity Statistical inference possible
Unstructured, free-forms	Data collection approach	Structured response categories provided
Researcher is intimately involved. Results are subjective.	Researcher independence	Researcher uninvolved observer. Results are objective.
Small samples – often in natural settings	Samples	Large samples to produce generalisable results (Results that apply to other situations)
Exploratory research designs	Most often used	Descriptive and causal research designs

Source: after Zikmund and Babin (2007); McGivern (2003)

Quantitative research aims to measure using numbers or a “numerical measurement of specific aspects of phenomena” (Miller and Brewer, 2003:192). The purpose of quantitative research is to test hypotheses or specific research questions. Particularly, quantitative research is used to test theory, identify general patterns and make a prediction (Miller and Brewer, 2003). Structured and standardized forms of data collection, such as surveys and questionnaires, are employed in order to collect data from a large sample. The aim is to form generalisations about phenomena or patterns. In terms of research types, most quantitative approaches use descriptive and causal research because the data are characterized by numbers (Zikmund and Babin, 2007).

In contrast, “qualitative research is concerned with rich and detailed description, understanding and insight rather than measurement. It aims to get below the surface, beyond the spontaneous or rational response to the deeper and more emotional response” (McGivern, 2003: 34). Qualitative research is used for a wide variety of purposes. It is used to generate, explore and develop ideas. In business or marketing it is used to help provide information for policies and strategies (McGivern, 2003). Qualitative research, as its name suggests, is more interested in qualities than quantities. Therefore, “qualitative research is not about applying specific numbers to measure variables or using statistical procedures to numerically specify a relationship’s strength” (Zikmund and Babin, 2007:129). The data in qualitative research are collected in small in-depth samples in order to seek meaning, and the approach “contributes to theory development by proceeding inductively” (Miller and Brewer, 2003: 193). It is more flexible than quantitative research as it is less structured and more free-form. Therefore, the researcher has the ability to modify or adapt interview guides or samples to suit the way in which the research is developing (McGivern, 2003).

However, both quantitative and qualitative research approaches have some disadvantages. Table 3.3 presents the main disadvantages.

Table 3.3: Disadvantages of Qualitative and Quantitative Methods

Main Disadvantages of Research Method	
Qualitative	Quantitative
Non-representative	Limited scope of data
Lack of bias control	Artificiality (instrument effect)

Source: Miller and Brewer (2003: 327)

Given the above disadvantages, it can be argued that “the combinations of qualitative and quantitative method together could mean that the weaknesses of one approach are cancelled out by the strength of the others” (Miller and Brewer, 2003: 327). Hence, using mixed methods is the most suitable approach for the current study as it will overcome these disadvantages.

The idea of combining research methods has been increasing in strength since the early 1980s (Zikmund and Babin, 2007). Creswell (2003) also mentions in relation to mixed methods that “These procedures also developed in part to meet the need to help researchers create understandable designs out of complex data and analyses” (p. 208).

Table 3.4 Mixed Method Strategies

		Time Order Decision	
		Concurrent	Sequential
Paradigm Emphasis Decision	Equal Status	QUAL + QUAN	QUAL → QUAN QUAN → QUAL
	Dominant	QUAL + quan QUAN + qual	QUAL → quan <u>qual → QUAN</u> QUAN → qual quan → QUAL

Note: “qual” stands for qualitative, “quan” stands for quantitative, “+” stands for concurrent, “→” stands for sequential, capital letters denotes high priority or weight, and lower case letters denote lower priority or weight.

Source: Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004: 22)

Mixed-method approaches use two strategies: concurrent and sequential. Researchers thus have to consider in which order they will use the methods (Table 3.4).

A concurrent strategy means that qualitative and quantitative research methods are used at the same time in an attempt to confirm, contrast or corroborate findings within a single study. The data collection in a concurrent study may be presented in separate sections, while the analysis and interpretation of the data may be presented as a combination of the two types of data which emerge from the two strategies (Creswell, 2003).

When using a sequential strategy, researchers decide whether qualitative or quantitative research is more significant. For some purposes, it might be better to use qualitative research, followed by quantitative; in contrast, the opposite might be

more appropriate for other purposes (Denscombe, 2007). When presenting the project's data there will be two distinct phases (Creswell, 2003).

Such researchers also consider the relative weights of the two methods. Indeed, they may in general tend to regard qualitative research as the main method and quantitative research as the subsidiary, or vice versa.

Furthermore, Bryman (2004) confirms that researchers can apply a combination of two kinds of research through the logic of triangulation, in which qualitative research facilitates quantitative research and quantitative research facilitates qualitative research. Triangulation means "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon. Through triangulation we can improve the accuracy of judgements and results by collecting data through different methods or even collecting different kinds of data on the subject matter of our study" (Ghauri, Gronhaug, and Kristianslund, 1995: 93).

In the current study, as shown in Table 3.4, a mixed-method approach is used to meet objectives 2, 3, 4 in which "qual → QUAN". Indeed, the qualitative research (in-depth interviewing) is subsidiary to and supportive of the quantitative research (questionnaire) (see Table 3.5). This is because new issues or factors may be discovered through the in-depth interviews with small samples at the beginning of the research as insight is gained into respondents' perceptions. The interviews should also help improve understanding of the problem and the knowledge gained from the interviews should help improve the quality of the questionnaire. Generally speaking, the in-depth interviews will hopefully verify and refine the variables identified as influencing Thai students to study at UK universities, their perceptions of the marketing strategies of UK universities and agencies' role.

Table 3.5: Mixed Method Sequential Strategy

Beginning stage	Following stage
qual	QUAN
Interview	Questionnaire
20 students from 4 English universities	339 Thai students nationwide

Source: Author

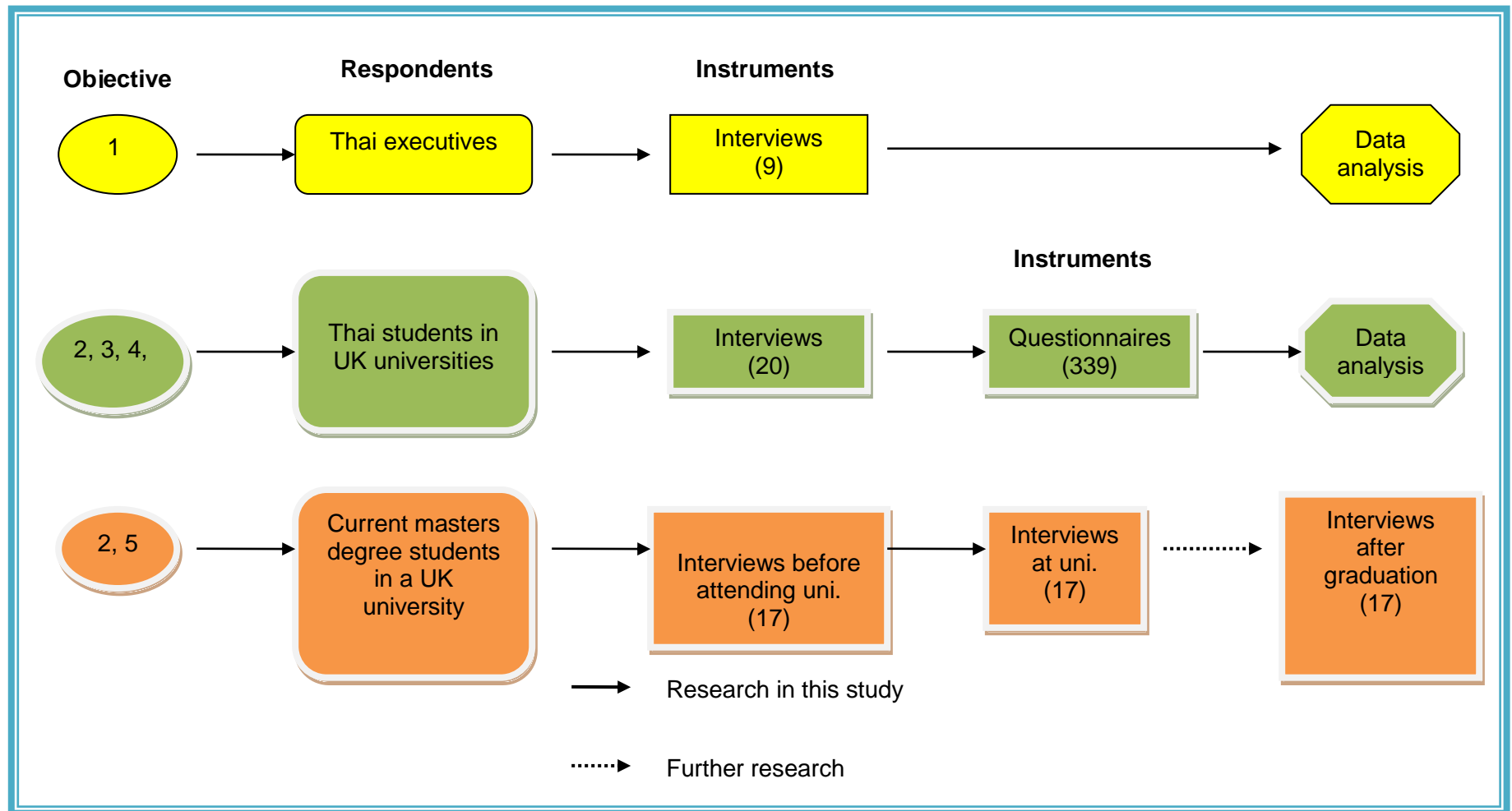
For the other objectives (1, 2 and 5), qualitative research is employed as the main approach. It is the most appropriate approach for shedding light and producing in-depth information on perceptions of UK higher education and UK graduates from the point of view of Thai executives in leading Thai universities and senior officers in higher education organizations (Objective 1). The factors of students' decision-making and their perceptions of the service quality of UK higher education from the interview of Thai students at a UK university from their expectation as well as their perception of experiences over a period of time may generate understanding of meaning and reflect students' needs (objectives 2 and 5). An overview of the research is given in Table 3.6, Figure 3.1 and the research framework in Figure 3.2.

Table 3.6 Research Objectives and Approaches

Objective		Approach	
1	To identify the perception of UK higher education among executives in Thailand's higher education	Qualitative: Interviews with 9 Thai executives	
2	To investigate factors relating to students' decision making regarding studying in the UK	qualitative: 20 students from 4 universities quantitative: online questionnaire to 339 students	Qualitative: interviews with 17 students
3	To investigate the marketing strategies of UK higher education used in Thailand	qualitative: preliminary interviews with 20 students from 4 universities Quantitative: online questionnaire to 339 students	
4	To investigate the role of educational agencies in Thailand and student satisfaction levels		
5	To investigate the expectation – experience gap that current Thai students experience in relation to UK higher education	Qualitative: longitudinal interviews with 17 students	
qualitative = subsidiary research		quantitative = subsidiary research	
Qualitative = main research		Quantitative = main research	

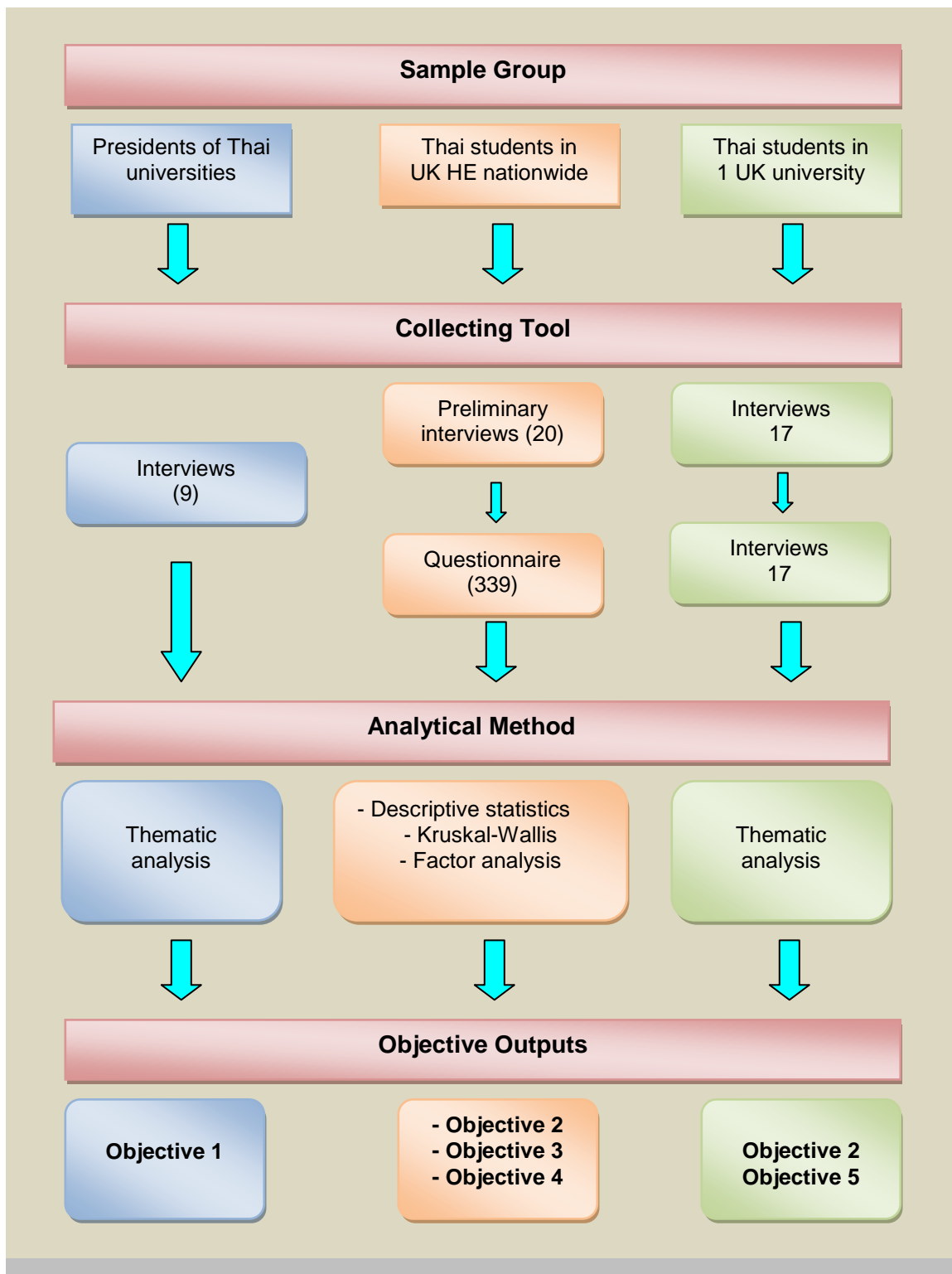
Source: Author

Figure 3.1: Summary of Research



Source: Author

Figure 3.2: Research Framework



Source: Author

As can be seen from Table 3.6, Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2, objectives 2, 3 and 4 are met with a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. In particular, preliminary interviews are used in the beginning stage as a qualitative approach to verify and refine variables from the points of view of the respondents. Then all the variables are examined for the purposes of the questionnaire in the following stage. The sample in the questionnaire comprises Thai students from UK universities across the country. Given the focus on qualitative research in objectives 1 and 5 (see Table 3.6, Figures 3.1 and 3.2), the in-depth interviews are the main research tools for these objectives. For Objective 2, the findings came from both Thai students in UK higher education institutions across the country and Thai students in a single provincial UK university.

3.4 Questionnaire Design

This section explains the procedure used to design the questionnaire in this study. This questionnaire is the main tool used to research objectives 2, 3 and 4.

- Objective 2: To investigate factors relating to students' decision making regarding studying in the UK
- Objective 3: To investigate the marketing strategies of UK higher education used in Thailand
- Objective 4: To investigate the role of educational agencies in Thailand and student satisfaction levels

As can be seen in Figure 3.2, this phase of the study starts with a qualitative approach using in-depth interviews (Stage 1) with a small sample in order to gain fruitful data with which to produce the questionnaire in Stage 2.

3.4.1 Stage 1 —In-depth Interviews

Preliminary in-depth interviews were planned because they can help gain considerable insight from each individual respondent. At this stage respondents could explain their experiences and why they chose to study in the UK, the factors

that caused them to study in a UK university, and the factors that led them to make the decision to choose their particular university, including its image and ranking. The in-depth interviews also aimed to verify additional factors relating to perceptions of the marketing strategies of UK universities and the role of the education agencies in Thailand.

3.4.1.1 In-depth Interview Sampling

To obtain respondents for the interviews, convenience sampling and the snowball technique were employed. Initially, the researcher searched for the top ten UK universities by number of Thai students. According to the statistics of the British Council (2008), the number of Thai students in the UK in 2008-09 was 5,160. The list of top ten UK universities by numbers of Thai students is presented in Table 3.7, below.

Table 3.7: Top Ten UK Universities by Number of Thai Students

No	University	Number of Thai Student
1	The University of Nottingham	250
2	The University of Surrey	195
3	The University of Northumbria at Newcastle	145
4	The University of Birmingham	140
5	University of the Arts London	130
5	Brunel University	130
5	Imperial College of Science, Technology and Medicine	130
5	The University of Warwick	130
6	The University of Manchester	120
6	The University of Leeds	120

Source: British Council (2008)

From the list of the top ten UK universities by Thai students' number in Table 3.7, three universities from the list were selected by purposive sampling strategy using location as a key variation. Three universities based in major urban conurbations were selected because the researcher can save time and budget for travelling and accommodation. For anonymity and confidentiality reasons they have been named University A, University B and University C. Although University D is not in the list, it was selected because it is growing dramatically fast. Also, University D is one of the highest National Student Survey rankings in the country and has maintained its top 10 position since the survey was launched six years ago, and it is also ranked in top 20 from more than 100 UK universities in *The Times* Good Universities Guide 2011. Furthermore, University D is among the top 1 percent of universities in the world as it climbed 28 places in *The Times* Higher Education World University Ranking 20011-2012 to become one of top 200 institutes in the world (*Times Higher Education*, 2012a).

From 9-15 November, 2009, interviews were undertaken with 7 students from University D, chosen by convenience sampling. Of these respondents, 2 were undergraduate students, 2 were master's degree students and 3 were Ph.D. students. The interviews lasted for approximately 25-35 minutes each. After this, the researcher contacted the Thai Society of University D to determine whether any Thai students at the university had any friends or relatives studying in the three chosen universities. Thus snowball sampling was applied and 13 students from the three universities were interviewed two weeks after the interviews with University D students. They lasted for around half an hour each, over a three-day period. The snowball technique is heavily reliant on human judgement (Bradley, 2010), therefore, it was not possible to balance the gender and the number of interviewees from each university because the sampling was generated by people's recommendations of friends and networks. Table 3.8 summarises the interview samples from each participating university.

Table 3.8: Interview Samples by University

No	University	Sample Size
1.	University A	2
2.	University B	6
3.	University C	5
4.	University D	7
Total		20

Source: Author

3.4.1.2 Interview Schedule

The interviewing of these 20 students took place in four universities during late-November 2009. The interviews included 30 questions and were divided into 3 sections: demographics, the effects of international ranking and marketing on UK higher education image, and the marketing strategies used in Thailand (see Appendix 1). Particularly, after the relatively informal demographic and personal questions, the respondents were asked about their experiences of choosing to study in the UK, followed by their views and images of UK universities and UK university rankings, and the effects on them of these university images and rankings. Next, the researcher moved on to the marketing strategies of UK universities as they applied to the Thai market. The questions concerned the sources of information that respondents gathered before making their decision to study in the UK and their perception of the UK higher education marketing strategies used in Thailand. Additionally, the respondents were asked to identify the strengths and weaknesses of UK universities and give their opinions on how UK universities could do more to attract Thai students to come and study in the UK. Finally, they were asked to share their opinions on the role of education agencies in Thailand.

The interview was in Thai in order to overcome the language barrier and was recorded using an MP3 player. However, note-taking was also used in case of any malfunctions. The interview was conducted over a period of 7 days in University D (7 students) and over another 3 days in the rest of three universities (13 students).

The results of the in-depth interviews were analyzed and used to verify attributes, factors and characteristics related to higher education in the UK. The benefit of the in-depth interviews was that they enhanced the quality of the questionnaire as the information obtained was from the point of view of current students with actual experience of studying in a UK university, and students were able to answer freely. In other word, the qualitative research was used to develop the questionnaire structure.

3.4.2 Stage 2 —Questionnaire

This stage followed the analysis of the data from the in-depth interviews in the previous stage. The in-depth interviews assisted in identifying those issues that were relevant to the study and provided a direction in which the study could proceed. These issues included impressions of the UK, university rankings, university images, marketing strategies and the roles of education agencies. Furthermore, questions related to the impressions of the UK were adjusted in accordance with higher education literature in terms of country characteristics (Lawley and Perry, 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Cubillo et al., 2006; Pimpa, 2003) and higher education characteristics (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2003; Cubillo et al., 2006). Also, a number of items taken from higher education literature were added to the questionnaire. These related to recognition of qualifications (Mazzarol, 1998; Lawley and Perry, 1998; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Cubillo et al., 2006; Maringe and Carter, 2007) and image and prestige (Arambewela and Hall, 2001; Arambewela et al., 2005; Cubillo et al., 2006).

A questionnaire is “a preformulated written set of questions to which respondents record their answers, usually within rather closely defined alternatives” (Sekaran, 2003: 236). It is regarded as the most widely used survey instrument across the social sciences (Burton, 2000), business studies (Ghuri et al., 1995), and hospitality and tourism research (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008). A questionnaire can collect data on the opinions, behaviour and attitudes of respondents, as well as respondents’ characteristics (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008).

In this study, the questions in the questionnaire were similar to those used in the Stage 1 interviews. The attributes of most of the questions were developed from the information derived from the interview respondents. To maintain equivalency of meaning in the questions, and to facilitate the respondent to build up a full picture of each topic area, the questionnaire was translated into Thai (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008).

3.4.2.1 Questionnaire Schedule

The questionnaire had 26 questions and was divided into four sections (see Appendix 2).

Section 1: General Information (Q.1-Q.9)

The questions in this section related to respondents' demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, place of origin, highest educational level and work experience. Additionally, the respondents were asked to state how long they had been in the UK, whether they had friends or relatives who had studied/were studying in the UK before they arrived, and the university they were studying at now. The two final questions in this section were about the level of their present study and source of financial support while at university. Although many researchers advise that demographic questions should be left until the end of the questionnaire (Peterson, 2000; Zikmund and Babin, 2007; Bryman, 2004), starting the questionnaire with demographic questions was a more familiar approach for Thais that helped warm them up towards it and made them feel more comfortable about rating their attitudes.

Section 2: Country and Higher Education Characteristics, University Ranking and University Image (Q.10-Q.19)

The respondents were asked to state who had influenced them to study in the UK and how much they had compared the UK to other countries before making a decision. Question 13 aimed to understand which of the UK country characteristics influenced students' decision making, while the next question (Q.14) asked more generally about higher education characteristics in the country. Next, the

respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with statements regarding university image (Q.15). Then the questions moved to UK university ranking in Q.16-Q.19. Specifically, in Q. 17 the study tried to identify whether UK university ranking was the main factor that caused Thai students' decision to study in the UK. The scale in this section was based on a 5-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree) except for Q.10 and Q. 12, which used a 3-point scale, and Q.11 and Q.16, which were screening questions.

Section 3: Your Perception of Marketing Strategies (Q.20-21)

This section aimed to meet Objective 3 of this study. There were only 2 questions in this section. In the first question (Q.20) the respondents were asked to assess their responses to the marketing materials which influenced them when making their decision to apply to a UK university. In the next question (Q.21) the respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of the marketing mix strategies used by UK universities in the Thai market. 24 attributes were attached to the questions on a 5-point scale.

Section 4: The Role of Education Agencies (Q.22-Q.26)

In this section, the respondents were asked whether they had used any educational agencies before coming to study in the UK (Q.22). The data derived from the in-depth interviews indicated that masters degree students usually contacted the education agencies during their application process, while Ph.D. students preferred contacting universities directly. This filter question functioned to overcome this restriction in that respondents who had never had any experience of the education agencies were asked to skip to Q.25. Respondents who had had experience of the education agencies continued to the next question (Q.23). At this question, the respondents came across the statement "the education agency..." and had to rate the role of education agencies according to their personal opinions. Additionally, they were asked to indicate their overall satisfaction with the education agency (Q.24). In Q.25, respondents with and without education agency experience were asked to give their opinion on the statement "Private education agencies are an important marketing strategy for UK universities in order to promote, attract and sell themselves to Thai students". Finally, in the last question,

a reward was offered to the respondents who participated in the questionnaire. They had a chance to win a prize draw reward of £50. This monetary incentive was given as a means to increase the response rate (Bryman, 2004).

3.4.2.2 Piloting Questionnaire

After designing the questionnaire, it was piloted to ensure that the instrument would work in the field. Altinay and Paraskevas (2008) suggest that a questionnaire needs to be tested with a small number of informants, usually on a convenience sampling basis (Zikmund and Babin, 2007). The pilot study aimed to ensure that the questions operated well, the respondents understood the questions correctly and the questions flowed well (Bryman, 2004). A pilot study may benefit a researcher by giving an opportunity to improve the correctness and effectiveness of a questionnaire. Altinay and Paraskevas (2008) suggest that a researcher may ask informants to comment on questionnaires.

The questionnaire was piloted with 15 Thai students from University D (5 men and 10 women) from 23 to 27 March 2010 on a convenience sampling basis. This was because of time limitations and financial issues. The time needed to fill in the questionnaire varied from 7 to 20 minutes. After finishing, respondents were asked to give comments in the comment form provided (see Appendix 3).

The questionnaire comment form was provided as a means of facilitating the capturing of feedback from informants. It enabled them to explain their opinions of the questionnaire and was recordable. The form asked them to comment on general aspects of the questionnaire, including the layout, the order of the questions, the number of questions, the wording and the instructions. In addition, they were also asked “which question was found to be the most difficult to understand?”, “did you find any questions that you did not want to answer?”, and “did you find any questions that you feel should be removed?”. Finally, they were asked to provide any further suggestions regarding the questionnaire. The main feedback points were as follows:

- The questionnaire was easy to follow. The layout was easy to understand. However, the table in question 21 seemed to be too long. It was suggested that it would be better to split the table into smaller ones.
- The informants argued that there were too many questions in the questionnaire and some of them were too long.
- The wording in some questions was difficult, especially for informants who were not business students. An example was the phrase “marketing mix” (Question 21), which was felt to be complicated and might elude their understanding. Some informants suggested using the term “marketing issue” instead so that all types of informants could fully understand what was meant.
- Some questions might not have the same meaning for both informants and the researcher. In question 5, for example, “how long have you been in the UK?”, two second-year Ph.D. students, who graduated with a masters degree in the UK and returned to Thailand to work before coming back for their Ph.D. two years later, combined both periods of study, making it more than 3 years rather than 2 years. Question 21 (“To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements relating to general marketing mix used by UK universities in general?”) was felt to be ambiguous as it conveyed 2 possible meanings. On one hand, it might mean the marketing tools used by UK universities at the moment, whereas on the other hand it might mean the marketing tools that UK universities utilized prior to the students making their decision to choose a UK university.
- Some informants commented that some questions were similar to previous ones. They felt that they had answered the question already but it had returned. This may have been because the answer choices were similar across several questions, for example in questions 18 and 20.

The questionnaire was translated from English to Thai. Many researchers highlight the fact that a major problem when translating from one language to another is that a word in one language may not have a true equivalent in another (e.g. Twinn, 1997; Su and Parham, 2002; Chang, Chau and Holroyd, 1999). This drawback can affect the validity of a translated version as it may lose its original meaning and not

function as intended (Su and Parham, 2002). Hence, the researcher has to ensure that the words used have the closest possible meanings.

As a result, the translation may not be one hundred percent valid because some meanings in the original language may have been lost. Furthermore, a second language translation may not be equivalent to the original because the two have different cultural contexts. These drawbacks may affect the validity of the questionnaire results of this study.

3.4.2.3 Questionnaire Sampling

In most research, a sample is used to collect data rather than surveying the entire population. This is because it is impossible for a researcher to collect data from everyone. If it was possible, it would be expensive, time-consuming and a waste of human resources (Sekaran, 2003).

There are two major types of sampling techniques: probability and non-probability. In probability sampling, every unit of the target population has a known, non-zero probability of selection. Conversely, in non-probability sampling the segment of the population to be chosen is unknown. Hence, sampling units in non-probability sampling are selected on the basis of personal judgement or convenience (Zikmund and Babin, 2007).

As in this study the segment of the population to be chosen was unknown, non-probability sampling was the most appropriate method. Four types of non-probability sampling are available in research (Zikmund and Babin, 2007):

- Convenience sampling: this sampling technique aims to obtain those people or units that are most conveniently available. It is regarded as the most convenient and economical technique for the researcher.
- Judgement sampling: the researcher selects who should be in the sample based on his or her opinion about the characteristics required of sample members.

- Quota sampling: this aims to ensure that various subgroups are represented in the study to the exact extent that the researcher desires on the basis of pertinent sample characteristics such as gender, ethnicity, marital status or education.
- Snowball sampling: the researcher chooses initial respondents and asks them to recommend other people for inclusion who meet the criteria of the research (Sarantakos, 2005).

In this research context, convenience sampling and snowballing were chosen. It is convenient sampling because the sample needed to be any Thai students studying in the UK universities in 2010. The snowball technique was also used because the recommendation from one respondent to their friends who also meet the criteria would be helpful for the researcher (see further details in section 3.4.2.4).

3.4.2.4 Questionnaire Sample Size and Response Rate

After the convenience and snowball sampling were designed and the questionnaire corrected on the basis of the pilot feedback, the questionnaire was finalised and made ready to administer to Thai students in UK universities in late-April 2010. The online survey software “Qualtrics” was selected for data collection at this stage because it was convenient, cheap and fast.

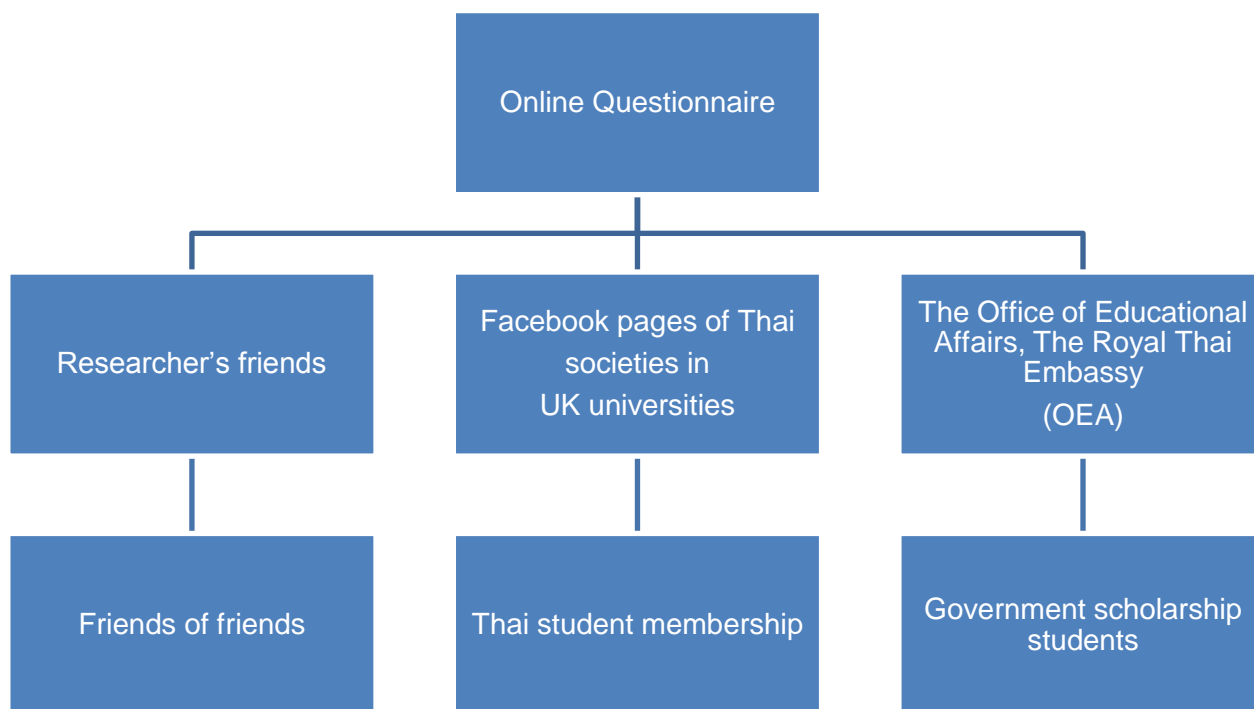
Another important process was determining the sample size. An important question is how big a sample size needs to be to provide a precise estimation of population characteristics (McGivern, 2003). The sample size must be decided on according to a variety of factors, such as time, budget, non-response, the heterogeneity/homogeneity of the target population, the purpose of the study and the nature of the data required (Sarantakos, 2005).

The population was Thai students studying in UK universities across the country. According to British Council statistics (2008), the number of Thai students in the UK in 2008/09 was 5,160. For a population of 5,000 individuals the expected sample size would thus be around 370 (at a 95% confidence level and with no

more than a 5% error rate) (Yamane, 1973) or, according to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a minimum of 357. Therefore, this research was expected to have at least 357 respondents given the time and resources that the researcher had.

To get respondents for the sample frame the online questionnaire was administered via 3 channels (Figure 3.3). The first channel was the researcher's friends. The researcher sent a link to the online questionnaire to friends in the UK via their electronic mail addresses and asked these friends to forward it to their Thai friends studying at any UK university. Therefore, it is snowballing to their friends. The second channel was Facebook. There were more than 900 million active Facebook users across the world at the end of March 2012 (Facebook, 2012). As Facebook has become popular in the online community, it has also become the easiest way to contact friends or co-workers for free. Many Thai societies in UK universities have signed up as social groups on Facebook to keep in touch with Thai members at each university and provide updated information to their members. Examples of Thai societies on Facebook are 'Provincial University X Thai society', 'The University Y Thai Society' and 'Thai Society the Provincial University Z' etc. The link to the online questionnaire was sent to the message boxes of these societies and was then forwarded by their administrators or creators to their members' message boxes. The last channel was the Office of Educational Affairs (OEA) of the Royal Thai Embassy in London.

Figure 3.3: Questionnaire Administration



Source: Author

The OEA is a Royal Thai Government department which is responsible for the government's scholarship students studying in the UK and other European countries, and for privately funded students being educated in the UK and some European countries (Office of Educational Affairs, 2012). It was formerly known as the Thai Government Students' Office. As it is a Thai governmental department, any contact with it is formal. The researcher wrote an electronic mail message to the minister for education explaining the aim and objectives of the research and asked for assistance with circulating the online questionnaire to those students for whom the OEA was responsible. Unfortunately, the OEA replied that it could only forward to government scholarship students due to privacy and safety issues relating to privately funded students. Once permission was given for government scholarship students, the minister for education forwarded an official letter and the questionnaire link via electronic mail to these students and asked them to kindly support the researcher's study. 339 respondents were gained from these three channels. This number was less than the expected sample size of 357 mentioned

earlier but was nonetheless an appropriate sample size. Firstly, according to Sekaran (2003), the appropriate sample size for most research is between 30 and 500 cases. Secondly, for the purposes of multivariate analysis, the sample size should be at least ten times bigger than the number of variables in the study (Sekaran, 2003). This research uses factor analysis, which is an aspect of multivariate analysis, in order to analyse 24 marketing factors that UK universities utilise in the Thai market. Therefore, 240 cases was the minimum sample size necessary. Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) also suggest having at least 300 cases for factor analysis. This means that the sample of 339 is valid and appropriate for this study. Finally, the sample size of this study is similar to or greater than those of some other higher education studies which questionnaires have been distributed. These include a study involving 110 Hong Kong students carried out by Willis and Kennedy (2005), 241 responses in research by Barnes (2007), 333 responses in research by Oldfield and Baron (2000), 259 responses in research by Soutar and Turner (2002) and 332 responses in research by Mai (2005). This again shows that the sample size of this study is large enough to make a valid estimation for the total population.

3.4.2.5 Data Analysis

In term of data analysis, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science) was used to analyze the quantitative data. Univariate, bivariate and multivariate analyses were employed.

Univariate analysis is used at the beginning of a piece of research to get to know the data. It summarises or describes data using frequency tables, central tendencies and measures of dispersion (Bryman, 2008). This is to give the characteristics or demographic information of the respondents, e.g. gender, level of education or financial support. In this study, frequency has been used to give respondents' profiles. Mean scores and standard deviation have been employed to represent factors related to students' decision making about UK universities, such as influential persons, country characteristics and educational characteristics.

Additionally, cross-tabulation has been introduced to explain the relationship between the level of education, friends/family members who have graduated in the UK and the use of education agencies as an information source.

Bivariate analysis is the analysis of two variables at the same time to test whether the two are related or differentiated (Bryman, 2008). The use of bivariate analysis depends on whether the data is appropriate to parametric or non-parametric statistics. According to Pallant (2007), parametric statistics are more powerful than non-parametric ones. A parametric test is used when the three following conditions are met (Bryman and Cramer, 2005: 144):

1. the levels or scales of measurement are of equal intervals or ratio scaling
2. the distribution of the population scores is normal
3. the variances of both variables are equal or homogeneous.

Non-parametric statistics, on the other hand, are distribution free tests as they do not require assumption of the distribution of population (Pallant, 2007). Pallant (2007) suggests that non-parametric techniques are ideal when the samples are small and when the data do not fulfil the above condition for parametric techniques. The Kruskal-Wallis test, a non-parametric test, was used in this current study. It can be used to compare the scores for continuous variables for three or more groups (Pallant, 2007). Thus, in this context, it was used to test the differences between the level of education and students' decision making regarding country characteristics and the educational characteristics of the UK.

The analysis of three or more variables at the same time is referred to as multivariate. The multivariate analysis method employed in this study is factor analysis. Factor analysis is a statistical technique used to reduce the number of factors from a larger number of variables to a smaller one in order to obtain a more manageable set of information (Zikmund, 2009; Wheeler, Shaw and Bar, 2004). Particularly, factor analysis is used for three main purposes (Bryman and Cramer, 2005):

- it helps to assess whether the items are tapping the same concepts or variables
- it reduces the number of variables
- "...it is aimed at trying to make sense of the bewildering complexity of social behaviour by reducing it to a more limited number of factors" (p. 325).

According to Ryan (1995), factor analysis is "essentially the same as multiple regression, except that the observed variables are regressed on unobservable factors" (p. 259).

There are two major approaches to factor analysis, depending on the major objectives of the research: exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Exploratory factor analysis is often used in the early stages of research when the researcher is uncertain about the interrelationships among a set of variables (Pallant, 2007). On the other hand, confirmatory factor analysis is "a more complex and sophisticated set of techniques used later in the research process to test (confirm) specific hypotheses or theories concerning the structure underlying a set of variables" (Pallant, 2007: 179). In addition, Steven (1996) points out that exploratory factor analysis is more geared toward generating theory, while confirmatory factor analysis is more geared towards testing theory. Steven (1996) presents a table showing the characteristics of the two approaches (Table 3.9):

Table 3.9: Characteristics of Exploratory and Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Exploratory (Theory generating)	Confirmatory (Theory testing)
Heuristic-weak literature base	Strong theory and/or strong empirical base
Determine the number of factors	Number of factors fixed a priori
Determine whether the factors are correlated or uncorrelated	Factors fixed a priori as correlated or uncorrelated
Variables free to load on all factors	Variables fixed to load on a specific factor or factors

Source: Steven (1996: 5)

However, it is not always clear which factor analysis approach to use. One example of this is that, in some cases, two factors may determine by the researcher but he or she might not be able to specify which variables will be represented in each factor (Kim and Mueller, 1994). Exploratory factor analysis is employed in this study because Objective 3 aims to explore the appropriate sets of marketing strategies used in the Thai market rather than to test a hypothesis.

Factor analysis usually has three steps: a correlation matrix, extracting the initial factors, and rotation to the final factors (Pallant, 2007; Kim and Mueller, 1978; Wheeler et al., 2004).

The correlation matrix is the first step. The matrix confirms the strength of the correlation between different variables for a group of observations or similarities between variables (Wheeler et al., 2004). Pearson's r , for example, is used to indicate correlations (Stapleton, 1997). If there are no significant relationships between variables or attributes then it is not worth proceeding with factor analysis as they are unrelated (Bryman and Cramer, 2005). Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black (1998: 99) suggest that "If visual inspection reveals no substantial number of correlations greater than .30, then the factor analysis is probably inappropriate". This study uses SPSS and two statistical measures that help with producing a correlation matrix: Barlett's test of sphericity and the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO). According to Pallant (2007), Barlett's test of sphericity must be significant ($p < .05$), and in the KMO value ranges from 0-1, with .6 the minimum value appropriate for factor analysis. Additionally, the sample size should be sufficiently large to make the correlation matrix reliable. According to Bryman and Cramer (2005: 326), "there is no consensus on what the size should be"; however, the general recommendation is the larger, the better (Pallant, 2007) and a study "should have more participants than variables" (Bryman and Cramer, 2005). Ryan (1995) suggests that the minimum sample size is 150 and should not have fewer than 10 variables. Further, there should be 10 or more respondents per item to be factor analysed. The questionnaire respondents numbered 339; therefore, the sample size is appropriate for factor analysis.

After checking the correlation between variables, the next step is to extract initial factors. The objective of extracting initial factors is “to identify and retain those factors which are necessary to reproduce adequately the initial correlation matrix” (Ferguson and Cox, 1993: 88). In other words, the point of extracting factors is “...to determine the minimum number of common factors that would satisfactorily produce the correlations among the observed variables” (Kim and Mueller, 1978: 12). The two most widely used approaches to extraction techniques are principal components analysis (PCA) and factor analysis (FA) (Bryman and Cramer, 2005). In PCA, all score variances are analyzed and the total variance score set is 1. In FA, on the other hand, only common variances are analyzed and the total variance varies from 0 to 1 (Bryman and Cramer, 2005) (Table 3.10).

Table 3.10 Differences between PCA and FA

PCA	Total Variance = Common variance + Specific variance + Error variance
FA	Total Variance = Common variance only

Source: Bryman and Cramer (2005)

West (1991: 140) suggests determining whether PCA or FA is suitable as follows:

If your purpose is no more than to ‘reduce the data’ to manageable proportions, you should use a principal components analysis... It does not matter whether factors produced have any theoretical validity. Conversely, if you are trying to discover psychologically meaningful underlying dimensions you should try a maximum likelihood factor analysis (cited in Ryan, 1995: 256).

In terms of the minimum number of factors retained and excluded, two main criteria which are already in common use are Kaiser’s criterion and the scree test (Pallant, 2007; Bryman and Cramer, 2005). Kaiser’s criterion constitutes one of the most commonly used techniques in factor analysis and is the default for a number of statistical software packages, including SPSS and SAS (Costello and Osborne, 2005). In Kaiser’s criterion, factors with an eigenvalue of 1 or greater should be retained (Bryman and Cramer, 2005); all factors which have an eigenvalue of less

than 1 are considered insignificant and are disregarded (Hair et al., 1998). This is because the eigenvalue represents the amount of total variance explained by a factor and an eigenvalue greater than 1 represents a substantial amount of variation (Field, 2005). According to many scholars, Kaiser's criterion can be criticized as inaccurate and tending to retain too many factors (Velicer and Jackson, 1990; Hayton, Allen and Scarpello, 2004; Costello and Osborne, 2005). Specifically, Costello and Osborne (2005) demonstrate that Kaiser's criterion overestimates the correct number of factors in 36 per cent of samples. This over-extracting is a problem for many published studies because it is a default value in most statistical programs (Velicer and Jackson, 1990). Hair et al. (1998) suggest that the eigenvalue technique is appropriate when the number of variables is between 20 and 50. Furthermore, according to Field (2005), Kaiser's criterion is accurate when the number of variables is less than 30 and the average community is greater than 0.7.

Another technique in factor extraction is the scree test developed by Cattell. This involves plotting a graph of each eigenvalue against the number of factors by order of extraction (Hair et al., 1998). According to Hair et al. (1998), it is called the scree test because its shape is similar to the loose rubble or fallen debris at the side of a mountain slope. Field (2005) advises applying a scree plot to reduce the number of factors when the sample size is greater than 200. The factors to be retained are the points which lie before where the curve straightens out (Bryman and Cramer, 2005; Child, 1990). However, a number of complications arise when using scree tests. Hayton et al. (2004) and Ferguson and Cox (1993) caution that scree tests may suffer from subjectivity and ambiguity because in some cases there is no clear break point in the line or there are two or more apparent breaks in the line, and these violate the rule of scree plotting. Additionally, Hair et al. (1998) point out that it is very common for the scree test to offer at least one or two factors more than the results gained using Kaiser's criterion. Although there are two additional factor extraction methods (Velicer's MAP criteria and parallel analysis) which are accurate and easy to use, they are not available in most statistical software and must be calculated by hand; therefore, Costello and Osborne (2005) claim that the scree test is the best choice. However, Linn (1968) claims that the scree test

should be used in combination with another method. This suggests that scree tests should not be used alone for factor extraction, so both a scree test and Kaiser's criterion will be undertaken for this study.

The last step, after the number of factors has been determined, is the rotation of factors. This final stage helps the researcher make an easier interpretation of factors by rotating them (Pallant, 2007; Doyle, 1972). The two main approaches to rotation are orthogonal and oblique; both have been employed in this study to enhance clarity and interpretation in the report (Pallant, 2007).

3.5 Interview Design

The role of interviewing is to obtain information of certain kinds. In particular, the interviewing in this study aims to answer objectives 1, 2 and 5. These objectives are:

- Objective 1: To identify the perception of UK higher education among executives in Thailand's higher education
- Objective 2: To investigate factors relating to students' decision making regarding studying in the UK
- Objective 5: To investigate the expectation – experience gap that current Thai students experience in relation to UK higher education

Two different sample groups are interviewed in this qualitative research. In Objective 1 the respondents are higher education and state enterprise executives in Thailand. In objectives 2 and 5, the respondents are Thai students at a UK University (see Figure 3.1 and 3.2). The next section presents the interview design for Thai executives.

3.5.1 Interview Design—Thai Executives

These interviews aim to meet Objective 1. At this stage of investigating the perception of UK higher education, interviewing people in relation to universities of

other countries helps give a balanced picture. The objective of these interviews is to identify the perception of UK higher education among executives in Thailand based in the university sector and private organizations.

3.5.1.1 Interview Sampling

Sampling is very important because in qualitative research a small number of people are needed in order to focus on the meaning of particular phenomena (Robson, 2002). Rubin and Rubin (2005) also confirm that it is important because the experience and first-hand knowledge of interviewees results in credible interviews.

In this study, Thai executives in leading universities, government education organizations and private enterprise were selected because this group of people are well-educated and have more power and reputation in Thai society than most people. Moreover, they have had experience of visiting leading universities in many countries and of working with graduates from the UK and other countries. Many of them are policy-makers and decision-makers for staff/lecturers in their organizations in terms of assigning scholarships for further education or training overseas (see Table 3.11 and Table 4.1). It was felt that investigating their perception of UK universities in relation to their perception of universities in other countries would give balance to this study. Hence, the interviewee characteristics mentioned above ensure the validity and credibility of these interviews. In particular, this group of people fall into the category of 'elite interviewees' as they are "...people in important or exposed positions who may require VIP interviewing treatment on the topics which relate to their importance of exposure" (Dexter, 1970 cited in Richard, 1996: 199). Therefore, these elite interviews required special focus and differed from the non-elite interviews.

The interviews used a purposive sampling technique. In such a technique the researcher selects a sample based on the characteristics required of the sample or who should be appropriate to be a sample (Zikmund and Babin, 2007; Sarantakos, 2005). At the beginning, a list was made of 15 respondents according to characteristics such as profiles, work experience, reputation in Thai society etc.

Contacting the interviewees took a very official pattern (Goldstein, 2002). The researcher first made contact with the interviewees in the middle of July 2010 in order to ask them to participate in the interview. 2 letters were sent at this time:

1. A letter of introduction to the research project from the University of Exeter's Business School issued by Prof. Simon James, who is a supervisor of the researcher.
2. An introduction letter from Suratthani Rajabhat University, which is the university that the researcher works for, issued by its president.

These letters clearly explained the basic outline, aim and objectives of the research (see Appendix 4).

However, formal contact via official letters may not be sufficient in contacting those in higher education senior management. The issues of gaining entry and consent from elite interviewees are regarded as a disadvantage of elite interviewing (Richards, 1996; Smith, 2006) and the researcher had to take them into consideration. Hence, informal contact was also obtained. This was through the support and recommendation of the president of Suratthani Rajabhat University, who has a close relationship with and is in a similar position of authority to the sample.

After the informal contact, 9 interviewees consented to participate in the process (see the interviewees' details in Table 3.11). The majority of the interviewees were from leading higher education organisations in Thailand, such as universities and the Office of Higher Education Commission (OHEC), apart from one female interviewee who was from a non-educational organisation (a state enterprise). As can be seen from Table 3.11, the sample in the interview has a ratio of 8:1 males to females. This reflects the fact that higher positions in Thailand's higher education are mostly taken by males, as is very common in Asian organizations.

Table 3.11: The Interviewees' Details

No	Interviewee	Gender	Position and Organization
1	E1	Male	Chairman of Executive Board, University
2	E2	Male	President, University
3	E3	Male	Director, the Commission on Higher Education in Thailand
4	E4	Male	Vice-President, University
5	E5	Male	President, University
6	E6	Male	President, University
7	E7	Male	President, University
8	E8	Male	Director, The Commission on Higher Education in Thailand
9	E9	Female	Director of Human Resources, State Enterprise

Source: Author

3.5.1.2 Interview Schedule

One important issue in elite interviews is that interviewees are usually engaged with busy schedules and time limitations which tend to preclude high-quality detailed interviews (Tansey, 2007). Hence, the interview questions were sent out to all the interviewees shortly after gaining their consent so that they could prepare draft answers in advance and tailor how much time they were prepared to give to the interview (Richards, 1996). Then appointments were made at interviewees' convenience.

The interviews were in 2 sections (see Appendix 5):

Section 1: the interviewees' profiles, including educational backgrounds and work experience.

Section 2: their perceptions of UK Higher education, its graduates and other countries higher education.

The interviews were administered between 16 and 23 September 2010 in Bangkok. Bangkok was chosen because it is the capital city of Thailand and many

universities and government organizations are located there. Making appointments with interviewees was very difficult and took longer than expected as they were in very high positions and had very busy schedules. Fortunately, interview appointments were made 4 days in a row, resulting in a lower budget and less time travelling to and staying in Bangkok. The interviews were conducted in Thai and lasted between 15 and 60 minutes. A tape recorder was used; recording helps to free the researcher to concentrate on the interviewees (Richards, 1996) and minimizes information loss (Aberbach and Rockman, 2002). However, note-taking was also used in case the electronic device malfunctioned. After the interviews, another letter was sent out to all interviewees a week later, thanking them and showing appreciation for their participation in the interview (Richard, 1996).

A major problem of these elite interviews was the limited time available. Some interviewees requested that the researcher restrict the interview to 15 minutes as they had another meeting to go to. In relation to this point, Richards (1996) suggests that the interviewer needs to have flexible questions. As a result, section 1, educational background and work experience, was skipped in order to gather the main information needed from section 2. Fortunately, they had personal secretaries the researcher could request personal profiles from in order to save time.

3.5.2 Interview Design—Thai Students

The second group of interviews was with Thai students at a provincial UK university. These interviews aimed to answer research objectives two and five:

- Objective 2: To investigate factors relating to students' decision making regarding studying in the UK
- Objective 5: To investigate the expectation – experience gap that current Thai students experience in relation to UK higher education

These interviews were designed as part of a longitudinal study because of “the need for higher education institutions to gather information on students' expectations not only during their time at university but also at the point of arrival

and, if possible, beforehand so that it is possible to track the development of expectations” (Rowley, 1997: 11). Also, the majority of research into students’ expectation-perception gap is based on quantitative research with lack of insight into the details of students’ experiences and the influential factors that a qualitative approach can bring out. Additionally, much research has collected data on students’ expectations and experiences of university at one and the same time (e.g. Joseph and Joseph, 1997; Mai, 2005; Arambewela and Hall, 2006; Ford et al., 1999). However, students may not have recognized their expectations before they attended university and this could result in biased findings. Hence, this study is designed to overcome this limitation by utilizing a longitudinal research design. “A longitudinal study provides data about the same individual at different points in time allowing the researcher to track change at the individual level” (Institute for Social and Economic Research, 2012). McGivern (2003) highlights the fact that longitudinal studies monitor changes in marketing or social environments, like a moving series of snapshots over a period of time. However, careful consideration must be carried out before undertaking a longitudinal study because the data collection involved takes much time and cost. This is why such studies are less commonly carried-out in social science research (Bryman, 2004). Also, some respondents may drop out after a period of time and it is difficult to replace them (McGivern, 2003). In higher education research in this area there is much reliance on cross-sectional research, with few researchers using longitudinal studies to track students’ perceptions over a period of time (e.g. Hill, 1995; Moogan et al., 2001; O’Neill, 2003).

During this research the same students were interviewed twice: before they attended the university (Phase 1) and after experiencing the university for some time (Phase 2). The first phase covered factors related to students’ decision making and their expectations of university. The students’ decision-making factors as uncovered in the interviews were then used as triangulation to support the results found in the questionnaire. The second phase revealed students’ experiences after a period of time at the university.

Phase 1

The objective of this phase was to identify students' decision-making's factors in relation to choice of country, of university and expectation/benefits of the degree, and to identify their expectations of their UK university before they began their studies. In other words, this phase aimed to research objectives 2 and 5 of this study. Students were contacted for interviews before they attended the university in order to ensure that their initial expectations were elicited. In particular, they were contacted when the majority of them had just arrived and before the first semester started on the 4th October 2010. They were interviewed around one week before they started their course. The aim was to discover the perspective they had before they arrived when it was still in their short-term memory and before they experienced university.

Phase 2

The second phase followed-up the first phase interviews with the same seventeen students. The purpose of this phase was to identify the students' university experiences and investigate how these differed from their expectations over the nine months. The gap between expectations and experiences was thus identified in this phase. As this was a longitudinal study, the students in phase 1 were interviewed again nine months after starting university. Therefore, the researcher can track how their expectations have been changed over this period of time. Since there was a long gap between interviews, there was a greater chance that the interviewees would drop out. The researcher had to make an effort to maintain a number of interviewees from the first phase, so the relationship between the researcher and the interviewees was important.

3.5.2.1 Interview Sampling

As mentioned above, Thai masters degree students at a provincial university in the UK were selected for the interviews. The students were contacted in the middle of September 2010 using convenience sampling via the Facebook pages of university Thai societies and a snowball technique in which people were asked to

recommend friends to take part in the interviews. Seventeen students were interviewed in total.

The interview was piloted with 2 Thai students from a pre-sessional English programme. Piloting an interview may prove fruitful for research by eliminating ambiguous phrases (Oppenheim, 2000). It also helps with making accurate time estimations for interviewing. The pilot found that there were some difficulties in understanding questions, for example 'what is your expectation regarding the social life on the campus?'. Therefore, this question was modified to 'what is your expectation regarding the variety of social life factors such as activities and clubs on the campus?' to make it easier to understand.

3.5.2.2 Interview Schedule

In the first phase (the expectations of the students), the questions were divided into four parts: demographics, decision-making, expectations about university and what they will get from degree (see Appendix 6). In the demographics section, the questions asked about gender, area of study, financial support, work experience, origin and whether they had friends or family members who had graduated from a UK university. The second section concerned their reasons for decision-making in each choice. This had 2 questions asking why they decided to study in the UK and at their particular university. The third section related to their expectations of university within 6 categories: location; quality of teaching and teaching facilities; support staff; library, computing and IT; accommodation and social life. Many categories included sub-categories; for example, the quality of teaching and teaching facilities sub-categories were the quality of teaching and teaching support facilities. This section also asked the respondents to rate their levels of expectation and their perceptions of their experiences on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest). This scale could then be used to compare and analyse the gap between their expectations and experiences of university. Finally, the last section asked students about their benefits from the degree after graduation.

The majority of the semi-structured interviews were conducted shortly before the first semester started, from the 23th September to 3rd October 2010. However, the last interview with a male student was conducted on the 7th November, shortly after the semester started, due to a lack of balance between female and male respondents. Unfortunately, there were around 5 times more female than male Thai masters degree student at this university in 2010/2011 (women 21 and male 4), so it was impossible to balance the two genders. This indicates the population in this university of which 14 females and 3 males comprised the sample, which reflects the bias in the population. However, three males (out of four) participated in the research, so it reached 75 percent of the male population. The interviews were conducted in Thai and lasted from 23 minutes to 1.5 hours. All respondents were asked their permission for the interviews to be recorded.

The second phase focused solely on their perceptions of their experiences because the aim was to elicit these in order find the gap between the two phases. Therefore, there were no questions about decision-making's factors in this phase. It was undertaken nine months after the first phase interviews, between June and July 2011, immediately after the students had finished their examinations. The plan had been to carry out the second interviews in March 2011 but at that time the students were not available because of assignment due dates and examination preparation. As a result, the researcher decided to postpone the second phase interview to June-July, 2011. The interviews lasted between 25 minutes and 1.5 hours. The variation in duration resulted from the characteristics of the interviewees. For example, the older students gave more detailed points about many service quality categories than the younger students. Also, each student had different individual experiences to discuss.

3.5.3 Qualitative Data Analysis

Analysing qualitative data differs from quantitative data. Quantitative data analysis looks for patterns in quantitative and numerical data for statistical analysis (McGivern, 2003). The methods used for quantitative data analysis are “well-known and transparent” (Punch, 2005: 195). Conversely, qualitative analysis aims to

extract meaning from words and data and produce valid and reliable findings (McGivern, 2003). In other words, qualitative data analysis is used to understand what the data say about a research topic (Altinay and Paraskevas, 2008).

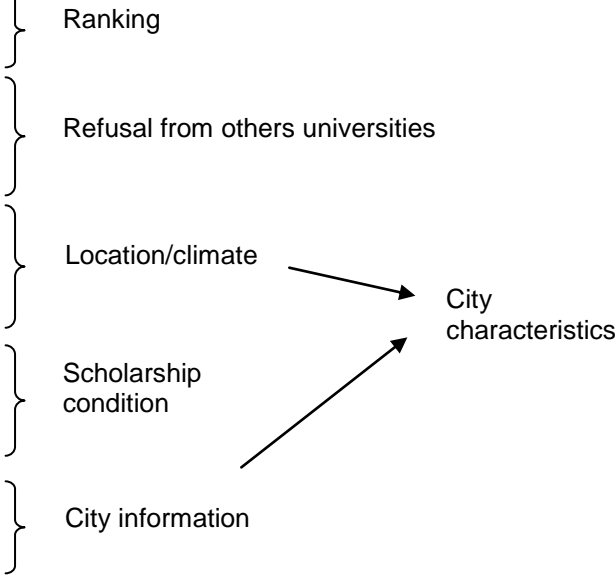
There is no rule, standard technique or clear procedure for analysing qualitative data (McGivern, 2003; Punch, 2005). Punch (2005) states that there are many different approaches to analysing qualitative data, usually depending on the purpose of the research. However, many writers seek to identify common features of qualitative data analysis, including Mile and Huberman, and Tesh (Punch 2005; Robson, 2002). However, this research follows Denscombe's (2007) process, which involves a series of four tasks:

- Code the data: before coding the data in this research, the interviews were transcribed from the tape recorder into raw data. As the interviews were undertaken in Thai, all the data was transcribed in Thai. This ensured that all the meaning was kept and promoted maximum validity. Transcribing gives researchers a chance to get into the data and know them thoroughly. At this stage, the transcripts were read carefully many times to assign the codes for the raw data. Codes are tags, names or labels that are attached to raw data. The coded data could be words or phrases, small or large data chunks (Punch, 2005). Coding can be done by pen and paper, word processor or computer software analysis (e.g. using NVivo or CAQDAS) (McGivern, 2003). In this research, a word processor was used to highlight and cut and paste data from the transcriptions which had relevant concepts or themes and put it into a separate document file. Although computer software assistance is popular, this research did not use it because the sample size was relatively small (N=9 and N=17).
- Categorize these codes: after coding data, the next step is "to identify ways in which the codes can be grouped into categories" (Denscombe, 2007: 293). This is like putting the individual codes under the same umbrella. This stage can reduce the number of codes as they may be merged into broader categories or general theoretical ideas. Within these broader categories they may then be further reduced by grouping them into topics that relate to each other (Creswell, 2003).

- Identify themes and relationship among the codes and categories: this stage links the codes and categories of data. Themes and subthemes were presented in a table so as to gain a better picture of the findings in the qualitative analysis chapter. Quotations were presented to illustrate typical interviewee experiences. These were selected from the transcript on the basis that they were the most illustrative or best evidenced the relevant point in the chapter. The selected quotations were translated into English before being put into the chapter.
- Develop concepts and arrive at some generalized statement: the final stage is to develop the concepts found in the data and make general conclusions.

The example of coding and categorize the code are shown in Table 3.12. In the table, one of students described her reasons of choosing University D rather than other universities. The code was extracted from the transcription and five reasons were coded: ranking, refusal from other universities, location/climate, scholarship condition and city information. Later, location/climate and city information were grouped as city characteristics because they shared some similarity. Finally, all of them were linked under the theme of external factors (see Table 5.4).

Table 3.12: Coding process

<p>I chose this university D because of the ranking. I did not choose University D as my first priority. I wanted to study at a university in London such as at University F, but I could not get in. University E is in the north. It is too cold and I don't like the cold weather there. I considered the weather. I got an offer from University L as well; however, I decided not to go there because if I chose D I got more scholarship than L. My friends also told me that L was too quiet, too lonely, and too natural city.</p>	 <pre> graph LR subgraph Codes R[Ranking] RU[Refusal from others universities] LC[Location/climate] SC[Scholarship condition] CI[City information] end LC --> CC[City characteristics] SC --> CC </pre>
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Source: Author

3.5.4 Ethical Issues

Punch (2005) states that although ethical issues can arise in both qualitative and quantitative research, they are more likely and more acute in qualitative research. This is because in qualitative research the researcher intrudes into interviewees' lives more than in quantitative research: "Some qualitative research deals with the most sensitive, intimate and innermost matters in people's lives, and ethical issues inevitably accompany the collection of such information" (Punch, 2005: 277). Thus, interviewees would be unlikely to co-operate with the research and the interviews would not elicit in-depth and correct information if interviewees felt that they could not trust the researcher. The researcher's job is to create trust and "to ensure, and demonstrate, that research is conducted in an acceptable and ethical way" (McGivern, 2003: 353).

McGivern (2003) provides the basis of most ethical standards in social research as follows:

- Voluntary participation: no-one can be forced into taking part in the research and all have the right to withdraw at any time.

- No harm to the participants: the researcher has a responsibility to ensure that the research cannot harm the respondents. This responsibility includes physical, mental and legal harm.
- Informed consent: the respondents must have the nature and purpose of the research explained to them in detail.
- Anonymity, confidentiality: the information given by the respondents is to be treated as strictly anonymous and confidential (Sekaran, 2003).
- Transparency: in some cases research can be conducted without the promise of anonymity or confidentiality. However, this can only be done with the consent of the respondents and the data received can only be used for the purpose for which the researcher stated when collecting the data.
- Not deceiving subjects: this involving hiding, lying or otherwise deceiving respondents in order to make them take part in research. For example, hiding the fact that it is a research study under the guise of telemarketing.

This research took ethical considerations into account in relation to all interviewees. Anonymity and confidentiality were preserved in all sample groups. This was especially important for the elite interviewees, given their contribution to policymaking. Tansey (2007: 7) states that “Elite interviews can shed light on the hidden elements of political action that are not clear from analysis of political process, analysts can gain data about the political debates and deliberations that preceded decision making and action taking, and supplement official accounts with first-hand testimonial”. Given this, interviews on sensitive issues have to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Additionally, the interviewed students were promised anonymity and confidentiality, therefore the names of the respondents and the university are protected.

The participants were informed that the research was for academic purposes only. They were treated with respect and efforts were made to ensure that they were comfortable with the questions by sending the interview questions to them in advance. All the interviewees were asked for their permission to use a tape recorder. This was because although a tape recorder allows an interviewer to

concentrate on what the interviewee is saying, its disadvantage is that some interviewees may be less forthcoming in the information they provide (Richards, 1996). The time and place of each interview was arranged according to the interviewees' convenience and comfort. As the interviews with the Thai students were longitudinal, they were interviewed twice within a nine-month period. At the start, it was explained that they had the right to withdraw at any time. Last but not least, one week after the executive interviews letters were sent out to the interviewees in order to thank them for their participation.

3.6 Conclusion

This thesis has five objectives. Each objective uses different research methods to obtain its result. This chapter has mainly discussed the appropriateness of the research methods used in this thesis. In particular, the mixed method approach was considered best-suited to meeting the goals of this study as it allowed the researcher to benefit from both quantitative and qualitative research methods. Therefore, interviews and a questionnaire were employed to maximize the quality of this thesis.

Regarding the objectives and data required for this study, many sample groups participated in this thesis. In Objective 1, to identify the perceptions of UK higher education from the view of high position related to higher education in other countries, nine respondents were selected from leading Thai universities, education organizations and a public enterprise for semi-structured interviewing through purposive sampling. To obtain data for the next three objectives, 20 students from four leading English universities were interviewed, using convenience sampling and the snowball technique. After data from these interviews were gathered, the factors and attributes were refined and verified for questionnaire purposes. A nationwide online questionnaire followed and a sample of 339 students was achieved. Finally, to meet objective 5, longitudinal interviews, in which the same group of 17 students from one UK university were interviewed

twice over the period of time, were used to discover students' expectations and perceptions of experiences and the gap between them.

The data analysis was also justified in this chapter. In particular, the data from the questionnaire were analyzed by SPSS software. At this stage, three types of analysis were employed. Initially, univariate analysis was used to explain the frequency and percentages of respondents' profiles, e.g. gender, level of education and students' financial support. The mean score was used to investigate factors related to students' decision-making processes relating to UK universities. For further investigation, an exploration of the differences between two or more variables, i.e. bivariate analysis, was conducted. At this point, Kruskal-Wallis was used to investigate the differences in students' decision making regarding the UK's characteristics as well as in educational characteristics among the three educational levels represented. Furthermore, multivariate analysis was applied. This was in the form of factor analysis in an attempt to reduce the number of attributes and better meet the third objective of this study. On the other hand, the analysis of the qualitative research was achieved through thematic analysis. The themes emerged and the data were presented as quotations to show respondents' points of view. Finally, ethical issues were considered throughout the data collection. One reason for this was that when interviewing a group of higher social class respondents it is necessary to pay more attention to their confidentiality and anonymity in order to get greater accuracy and in-depth data.

The following three chapters present the results of the qualitative approach. In particular, in Chapter 4 the perceptions of higher education in the UK derived from the in-depth interviews with people in high-level positions in Thai organisations will be examined. The results of the interviews with Thai students in a UK university regarding their choices of decision making and expectations will be presented in Chapter 5, while their perceptions of their experiences will be discussed in Chapter 6, alongside the gap between their experiences and their expectations.

Chapter Four

Results of Interviews with Higher Education Executives in Thailand

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the results from the in-depth interviews which were conducted in September 2010 in Bangkok. The respondents were persons in high positions in higher education organizations and a public enterprise organization in Thailand. They were interviewed on their perceptions of universities in the UK.

These interviews aimed to identify the perceptions that Thai executives hold of UK higher education, its graduates and its competitors. Furthermore, recent policies on sending scholarship students/staff members overseas for higher education are also explored in this chapter.

The results from this chapter are used to research Objective 1 of this study: to identify the perception of UK higher education from the perspectives of higher position executives in Thailand's higher education. These perceptions are important for UK university education marketers because they can help determine the appropriate key strategies that UK higher education can use to attract international students. The data from the interview were transcribed and then analysed by thematic analysis, as mentioned in the methodology chapter. Verbatim transcripts were obtained from the interview recordings so as to present the results.

This chapter comprises 5 sections: respondents' characteristics, the advantages and disadvantages of overseas education, perceptions of UK higher education and its graduates, perceptions of other countries' higher education and their graduates, and recommendations made to scholarship students.

4.2 Respondents' Characteristics

As discussed in Chapter 3, the respondents in these interviews are regarded as elite, so contacting them had to be undertaken on a very formal basis. The respondents were selected through purposive sampling, in which the researcher ensured that all the respondents had full knowledge of and experience in the higher education sector in both Thailand and overseas. However, one limitation of elite interview is the timing issue (Tansey, 2004). To overcome the problem of limited interviewing time being available, the respondents' profiles are based on secondary data received from their secretaries.

Table 4.1 summarizes the respondents' characteristics. As can be seen, the respondents in the interview were selected from private universities (2), public universities (4), a public enterprise organization (1) and the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) (2). Eight were men and one was a woman. This unbalanced gender proportion reflects the hierarchical structures of Thai organizations (see Section 3.5.1.1). The OHEC is a government organization. Its main roles are to manage, look after, develop, control standards in and evaluate the quality of higher education organizations in Thailand; all public and private universities are under its authority. OHEC also presents on behalf of Thailand in terms of collaborating with higher education organizations in other countries (OHEC, 2012).

Table 4.1 Profile of Respondents

No	Respondents	Gender	Position	Academic Title	Type of Organization	Country of Education Background
1	E1	Male	University Executive Board Member	Dr.	Private University	US
2	E2	Male	President	Assistant Prof. Dr.	Public University	UK
3	E3	Male	Director	Dr.	OHEC	US
4	E4	Male	Vice-President	Dr.	Private University	US
5	E5	Male	President	Prof. Dr.	Public University	US
6	E6	Male	President,	Prof. Dr.	Public University	US
7	E7	Male	President,	Prof. Dr.	Public University	France
8	E8	Male	Director	Prof. Dr.	OHEC	US
9	E9	Female	Director of Human Resources	-	Public Enterprise	UK

Source: Author

The nine respondents hold various positions. As can be seen in Table 4.1, many of them are in the very high position in universities, OHEC and a public enterprise; for example, university presidents (4) and directors of OHEC (2). In terms of academic titles, at least eight of the respondents hold a doctorate degree. Finally, all of them graduated overseas; the majority are US alumni (6), two are UK alumni and one graduated in France. All these characteristics confirm that the respondents are knowledgeable and experienced in higher education, not only in Thailand but also overseas.

4.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of Overseas Education

As many of the respondents are in high positions in Thai universities and also occupy high positions in OHEC, the data from the interview confirm that these people have the opportunity to visit higher education institutions in overseas countries. Indeed, many of them stated that they had visited other countries' institutions, including in the UK, the US, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and China.

When asked about the advantages of overseas education, the majority of the respondents agreed that overseas education brought various benefits to their organizations. These are summarized in Table 4.2, below, and include overseas experience, vision, job progression, language ability and knowledge and technology.

Table 4.2: Advantages of Overseas Education

Factors	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9
Overseas experience		✓					✓	✓	
Vision		✓				✓		✓	
Job progression		✓				✓		✓	
Language ability	✓								✓
Knowledge and technology			✓			✓		✓	

Source Author

The first benefit of overseas education was overseas experience, as confirmed by three respondents. A public university president and an OHEC director commented that:

“It’s an opportunity to see and learn new cultures, new experiences. It’s inevitable to meet with people from the West, the Japanese and people from the Middle East. We have to understand them; otherwise we will feel we are subordinate to them. It is better than being educated in Thailand in terms of benefits and life experiences.” (E7, male, public university)

“We learned their norms and the cultures of the countries we graduated from.”
(E8, male, OHEC)

These two accounts show that the experience they obtained while studying overseas gave them an opportunity to understand other cultures which people who graduated in Thailand could not have.

The second benefit was vision, as commented on by three respondents. At this point it was stated that new visions and ideas from overseas could be transferred to the workplace:

“Going overseas will initiate ideas from what they see and they will adapt them to their job in Thailand.” (E6, male, public university)

“Graduating overseas will help us open new vision to our work. If we can, we should not focus on one country but we should spread our staff to the UK, the US and the EU.” (E8, male, OHEC)

Three respondents commented that people who graduated overseas benefitted from greater job progression. For example:

“I support anyone in studying overseas because it grows people well and they will have more opportunities to progress in academic jobs.” (E8, male, OHEC)

It also benefits their salary:

“At my university, we pay higher salaries to overseas graduates than to Thai graduates for both masters and Ph.D. degrees.” (E2, male, public university)

It can be seen from these two comments that studying overseas brings the benefits of increased job progression, not least because of the language ability obtained. Two respondents supported this idea:

“At least they have an opportunity for improving their language skill; for example, they can improve their reading skill and they can have experience of researching in English.” (E1, male, private university)

“Studying overseas is a better opportunity than studying in Thailand. We practice our English and we know that the English that we practice from when we are young is useless because we can’t communicate with foreign people in a real situation.” (E9, female, public enterprise)

Finally, overseas education brings knowledge and technology into the country, as commented on by three respondents. For example:

“Some sciences and some academic knowledge are not available in Thailand.”
(E3, male, OHEC)

“I totally agree with my subordinates going to study abroad. Since I became a dean at my faculty, all teaching staff have had to promise to study for a further degree overseas. If they don’t, they will not pass our qualification. Therefore, it’s university policy. This does not mean I do not support PhD

degrees in Thailand. However, if we are in Thailand we cannot see the development of technology from other countries. Hence, it is compulsory to send our staff overseas.” (E6, public university)

These comments also reflect a lack of course availability and the perception that overseas universities are better than local institutes with regard to knowledge and technology. Research by Mazzarol and Soutar (2002: 84) on the push-pull factors of students from four Asian countries indicated that “The majority of students saw that an overseas course was better than a local one and this was an important factor motivating their decision to study overseas”. Additionally, they found that the non-availability of courses in their home country was also one of the reasons why students went overseas. Therefore, this research can be seen as supporting that of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002).

Tarry (2008) researched why Thai students study overseas. He found some pull factors which appeared to be stronger than the push factors. These were: 1) the opportunity to improve English skills, 2) overseas experiences, 3) increased status arising from recognized qualifications, 4) university reputations and 5) economic capital. It can be seen that the opportunity to improve English skills and the attraction of overseas experiences found in Tarry’s research (2008) are in line with the benefits of overseas study seen in this research.

Although there are many advantages to studying overseas, two disadvantages were found, personal adaptation and the cost of study, as shown in Table 4.3, below.

Table 4.3: Disadvantage of Overseas Education

Factors	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9
Personal adaptation		✓					✓	✓	✓
Cost of study						✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: Author

Four respondents mentioned the issue of personal adaptation in that one respondent proposed that some scholarship students have problems with their studies in overseas countries because they cannot adjust to the new environment:

“Many students are very smart in terms of studying; however, they are not ready in terms of socialization and the psychology of interpersonal relationships, in that they cannot adjust themselves to the new environment and have problems like homesickness. Some students cannot tolerate missing their children and finally end up returning to Thailand.” (E8, male, OHEC)

Many researchers in higher education have also reported that loneliness and homesickness are most likely to affect international students (e.g. Kinnell, 1989; Lacina, 2002; Toyokawa and Toyokawa, 2002; Ward and Masgoret, 2004; Forbes-Mewett and Nyland, 2008).

Another respondent suggested that personal adaptation was not a problem while students were overseas but issues arose when students returned to Thailand after graduating:

“I have found that many students who have studied overseas since their undergraduate or high school years find it difficult to readjust themselves to the Thai environment, and Thai society’s characteristics, when they return home.” (E7, male, public university)

This respondent confirmed that life at home after these students have returned may involve difficulties and change. The concept of personal adjustment is also reported in Tarry (2008) in that some students in his research found difficulties in readjusting to life at home after a lengthy sojourn overseas. It should be noted that the problem of the personal readjustment of students to the Thai environment after studying overseas has been reported as a longstanding problem since King Rama V’s era in 1871 (Amarinratana, 1979).

The final disadvantage of overseas education is its high cost, as commented on by four respondents.

“...At present, knowledge or higher education are the main sources of income for many countries such as England, America, Australia and other countries. As a result, the expenses are very high. I send my staff to England; each year it costs 1.5 million baht per person...” (E6, male, public university)

Although overseas education brings many benefits to Thailand and international students, it is clear that it is a costly investment. Many scholarship students refused to return to Thailand after graduation. At this point, some of the university presidents and an OHEC director added that their organizations impose penalties on those staff who do not return to Thailand. This ensures that sponsors will get a return from their human resource investment.

In summary, the results show that studying abroad has many advantages. However, these advantages come with the high cost of education overseas and possible adjustment problems for the students.

4.4 Perceptions of UK Higher Education and its Graduates

4.4.1 Perceptions of UK Higher Education

After asking general questions about the advantages and disadvantages of studying abroad, the researcher moved on to specific questions which focused on respondents' perceptions of UK higher education. Understanding perceptions of UK higher education is one of the main research questions relating to Objective 1 of this study. In general, many of the respondents had experience of visiting UK higher education institutes due to work visits, training or study experiences. Some university presidents and one vice-president explained that their universities had agreements or joint programmes with some UK universities.

Table 4.4: Perceptions of UK Higher Education

Factors	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9
Reputation for educational quality	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Expensive				✓	✓		✓		
Conservatism				✓	✓				
Individuality								✓	
Social standing				✓					

Source: Author

The data from the interview indicated that there were five perceptions of UK higher education, as shown in Table 4.4; namely, a reputation for educational quality, being expensive, conservatism, individuality and bringing enhanced social standing, or 'Puu Dee'.

The first perception of UK higher education was its good reputation for educational quality, as commented on by all nine respondents. This meant that not only did the respondents who graduated in the UK have a high view of the quality of UK higher education but also those respondents who graduated in the US and France. A male respondent who graduated in the US pointed out that students who graduated from the UK were of better quality than US graduates:

“The UK graduates are smarter than the US graduates because the teaching system of Europe and the UK is very concentrated and of a high standard. There are high expectations of lecturers’ and institutes’ quality; hence, UK graduates have a higher quality of academic knowledge.” (E1, male, private university)

He also had a view of the admissions system of UK universities:

“Studying for a masters degree in a UK university is not easy but studying at the same level in a US university is easy. The American universities focus on the quantity of students. It is like a business because the international students pay three times what the local students do. The UK admissions

system, in contrast, limits the number of international students because they focus on quality more than quantity.” (E1, male, private university)

His experience of studying in the US highlights the idea that the quality of higher education should come before the quantity of graduates. His view hypothesizes that the focuses of UK higher education and US higher education may differ.

Another view of educational reputation was given by a respondent who stated that:

“My perception of UK universities is that they are excellent in all areas. I see the best knowledge in the world in the UK. I believe that the UK is the final destination for academia and this perception has never changed... I think UK universities are a role model for universities in other countries, and still at the top of the world.” (E3, male, OHEC)

It should be noted that this respondent was also a US alumni who had a positive view of higher education in the UK. His quotation suggests that the UK is accepted as having a good educational reputation and as offering excellent value for students from abroad. This is congruent with Kinnell (1989) in her study on the perceptions of overseas students in UK universities, which found that the reputation of UK universities was an important reason for international students choosing to study in the UK. One respondent in her study commented that “the world knows that a British degree is free of corruption and cannot be bought” (Kinnell, 1989: 16). However, this view from executive in Thailand may differ from the view point of students’ interviews in Chapter 5. It is important to consider those students have to pay their own tuition fees. They may be more concerned about the duration and cost of study than quality when studying in the UK.

The interview data also show that this good reputation for educational quality results from the long history of British education. This view was expressed by two respondents. For example, a private university vice-president who has a US background commented that:

“UK higher education has been developing longer than US higher education. British education has been developing for six or seven hundred years but America’s universities are only three or four hundred years old. As a result, the UK has added value arising from the long history of its education.” (E4, male, private university)

In addition, educational originality was another aspect of the reputation for educational quality. A comment on originality by a respondent from a public enterprise was “I believe that England is the mother of English. It is the original for education and more traditional than America...” (E9, female, public enterprise). Furthermore, a respondent from a private university said that:

“England has been a pioneer of quality assurance in higher education for a long period of time, and the new executive boards at universities have efficiently taken over the former executive boards when they have resigned and have maintained the same quality control.” (E4, male, private university)

This quotation confirms that British education’s reputation for quality comes from its ability to maintain quality assurance. It should be noted that the quality assurance of British universities is widely recognized in Thailand. Evidence for this comes from the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEMEO-RIHED) (2009), which has made study visits to the UK for ‘senior university administrators’ of Thai and Southeast Asian universities on ‘Quality Assurance and Recent Trends in Higher Education Reforms in the UK’ for three years in a row. Thus, British universities’ quality assurance has become a role model for Thai universities.

In addition to its reputation for educational quality, however, UK higher education is also perceived as expensive. Three respondents commented that the cost of studying in the UK is higher than in other English-speaking countries such as Australia and the US. For example:

“So far it is not because of educational quality that international students do not choose the UK, it is because of the cost of studying. Australia’s

education is the same standard as in the UK but it is much cheaper in terms of living expenses and fees...” (E4, male, private university)

The above quotation indicates that although the UK benefits from its educational reputation, the tuition fees and the cost of living and studying in the UK are also taken into consideration by students, their parents and foreign sponsors who pay tuition fees for their students. Furthermore, E4 also warns that:

“...graduating from the UK, Australia and New Zealand get the same salary but have different costs. If we do not gain a social value from being British graduates because our princes graduated there in the past, why do we have to go to the UK? Nowadays, the US and Australia have become more popular and are much cheaper.”

This result may suggest that it may be difficult for UK universities to market themselves in the global market because of the high tuition fees compared to competitors. The perception that British education is costly has been found in much literature. Li et al. (2009) found that Taiwanese students held a belief that higher education in the UK cost more than higher education in the US and Australia. Research by Lawley and Perry (1998) also confirmed that UK higher education was perceived as very high quality but the most expensive destination among education exporter countries (e.g. Australia, New Zealand, US and Canada) for both Thai and Malaysian students.

Thirdly, UK institutes are perceived as conservative, as pointed out by two respondents, from a public and a private university, respectively. The private university executive stated that:

“British education is regarded as conservative in its epistemology, and people in Thailand regard Britain as the best for social sciences and philosophy. It is also conservative in its method of meeting with supervisors who are very traditional and very formal; this traditional method may have

been created to make students proud of studying with those who have the most expertise.” (E4, male, private university)

This comment was supported by another respondent who said that “the graduates from the UK are prone to be conservative” (E5, male, public university). The perception of British people as conservative did not come from respondents who were UK alumni but was clearly seen in the views of US alumni such as E4 and E5. This perceived conservatism may be a result of the long history of UK institutes.

The fourth perception is the individuality or independence of students who graduate from the UK. Only one respondent from OHEC (E8), with the US background, agreed with this idea. He stated that staff and students in the UK are seen to be more distant from each other. Students also have to research by themselves and supervisors seem not to closely advise their research students. This is the opposite of the American system in which he graduated, where stronger relationships are formed between students and lecturers.

The final perception, suggested by a respondent from a private university, is the concept of social standing. His comment is as follows:

“...in the past our princes had good education from Oxford and Cambridge. Since then, the phrase ‘Puu Dee Ang Krit’⁵ and graduating from the UK has become a matter of social standing in Thai society. Thus, Thai people flock to study in the UK... they hope to gain popularity, ‘Puu Dee Ang Krit’, up-to-date knowledge...” (E4, male, private university)

‘Puu Dee’ refers to people from an upper-class background who are rich and powerful in Thai society, usually from aristocratic and royal families. In the past, only Thai princes, royal relatives of King Rama V and people from ‘Puu Dee’ families were sent to study in the UK since 1871 (Visissobha, 1997). After the early

⁵ ‘Ang Krit’ means Britain, ‘Puu Dee Ang Krit’ is equivalent to “British gentleman”

royal and aristocratic family groups graduated from the UK and returned to Thailand, they brought back not only modern knowledge but also British manners and etiquette (*Thaipost*, 2012). These characteristics were considered refined and elite, and these students were called 'Puu Dee Ang Krit'. Later, higher education was promoted more generally in Thai society and people from lower classes had more opportunities to study overseas, especially in the UK. Following this, the concept of 'Puu Dee' gradually expanded from only upper-class people to include all who had been educated the UK. This clearly influenced Thai social values by encouraging people to study in the UK in order to shape them into 'Puu Dee Ang Krit'. This idea of social standing can be seen in the statistics by Thammasakmontri (1923) and the Ministry of Education (1926), which show that the UK was the most popular destination for Thai students compared to other countries in that period (see Tables 2.7 and 2.8). Also, research by Lawley and Perry (1998), who interviewed Thai and Malaysian students on their general perceptions of overseas study destinations, highlighted that one general perception of the UK among Thai students was that the UK was the destination of the elite but this perception was not seen in the Malaysian sample. Although this idea has faded in the present, the comment made by this respondent proves that it still persists.

The results from the interviews suggest that most of the respondents' perceptions of UK higher education were positive except that they saw it as expensive. This supports the idea that UK higher education has the strength and opportunity to grow in the Thai market and possibly retain its positive reputation in Thailand. The positive perceptions highlighted here lead to its ability to remain competitive in attracting Thai students to the UK. However, the perception that UK higher education is expensive may have some impact on persuading prospective international students to the country. Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) found that the best way to attract more international students was to lower tuition fees, so perhaps doing this would help the UK's market penetration.

4.4.2 Perceptions of UK Graduates

As well as their perceptions of UK education, the respondents were asked to explain their perceptions of graduates from UK universities. Each respondent was also asked to name a well-known person in Thailand who graduated in the UK and to explain their characteristics. This helped with discovering the respondents' perceptions of UK graduates because naming a particular person gave an opportunity to focus on a distinct characteristic of that person in a more subjective way which the respondents might otherwise have overlooked or neglected. Furthermore, it was also an opportunity to investigate whether perceptions of UK higher education might be reflected in perceptions of UK graduates.

Due to the fact that Thais have been sent to study in the UK since the King Rama III era (Amarinratana, 1979), the number of famous people in Thailand who graduated in the UK is enormous and can be divided into 2 main sectors: political and academic.

In the political sector, it is interesting that many respondents named the same persons, including three former Prime Ministers (M.R.⁶.Kukrit Pramoj⁷, Mr. Anan Panyarachoon⁸ and Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva⁹) and a former Minister of Finance (Mr. Korn Jatikavanich). From outside the political sector, people in high positions in the Ministry of Education and scientists were named. A respondent from OHEC confirmed that people with UK degrees had a considerable impact on the development of science and technology in Thailand:

“These people are a powerful group that innovate science and technology in our country. Many of them graduated from Imperial College. In the Faculty of Science at my university, 30-40 percent of the researchers graduated from the UK... They helped to set up the Ministry of Science and

⁶ M.R. is a title showing royal descent.

⁷ the 13th Prime Minister of Thailand

⁸ the 18th Prime Minister of Thailand

⁹ the 27th Prime Minister of Thailand

Technology in Thailand, which made a big change to science and technology in our country.” (E3, male, OHEC)

The powerful people in this group that the respondents named were: Dr. Krissanapong Keeratikorn¹⁰, Prof. Dr. Adul Wiriyawejakul¹¹ and Prof. Dr. M.R. Jisnuson Svasti¹². These people, in both the political and education sectors, are evidence that many Thai students who graduate from the UK are very successful in their careers and many of them take very high positions and have a good reputation among generations of Thais.

The information gained from the interviews reveals a variety of perceptions of UK graduates among the respondents: ‘Puu Dee’, knowledge and quality, individuality and reserve, being good thinkers, having high ethical standards, being trustworthy and polymaths. Table 4.5 summarises their views.

Table 4.5: Perceptions of UK Graduates

Factors	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9
Puu Dee		✓					✓		✓
Knowledge and quality	✓					✓	✓		
Individuality and reserve					✓		✓	✓	
Good thinkers	✓		✓						
Strong sense of ethics	✓								
Trustworthiness				✓					
Polymaths								✓	

Source: Author

¹⁰ Ex Secretary-General, Office of Higher Education Commission, Thailand

¹¹ Ex President, Mahasarakam University

¹² Founding Member, Thailand Academy of Science and Technology (1997), Outstanding Researcher, Chemical Sciences and Pharmacy Section, National Research Council of Thailand (2003)

In the first perception, UK graduates were regarded as 'Puu Dee', as commented on by three respondents. 'Puu Dee' can be described as a social standing and represents various characteristics of people who have been educated in the UK (as mentioned earlier, in Section 4.4.1). Here, respondents mean personal characteristics such as good manners and ways of thinking. The following statements give examples:

"In general, people who graduated in the UK have a typical pattern which is distinguishable from graduates of other countries. This is what we regard as characteristic of 'Puu Dee'; for example, their manners and etiquette, their way of thinking and their thinking framework." (E7, male, public university)

"They are 'Puu Dee' as they have the softness of British gentlemen and politeness in the way they speak and their manners. Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva and Mr. Korn Jatikavanich are two examples. I see they have good manners... It may be because of their personal characteristics plus the way they were trained there; the word 'Puu Dee' still works at present." (E9, female, public enterprise).

These two comments show that Thai students who graduate from the UK are perceived of similarly to UK higher education in that UK alumni have brought back not only knowledge but also the manners of 'Puu Dee Ang Krit'. *Thaipost* (2012) also confirms that the real 'Puu Dee' is 'Puu Dee Ang Krit'. This 'Puu Dee' characteristic has not been reported among Thai students who have graduated in other countries.

The second perception was the high knowledge levels and quality of UK graduates. Three respondents agreed on this perception, including a respondent from a private university who commented that people perceived that graduates from UK universities had more knowledge than their US counterparts:

"I think people perceive that UK graduates have more in-depth knowledge than US graduates, except that graduates from the top ten universities of

the two countries have a similarity in terms of knowledge; for example, Oxford and Cambridge versus Stanford and MIT. Since the US universities are so many, there is variety in standards and quality. Hence, the general perception of UK graduates is surer because there are fewer universities in the country.” (E1, male, private university)

Also:

“...I can see higher academic seriousness from those graduates from the UK (and European graduates) than from others.” (E7, male, OHEC)

These two accounts help to confirm the higher knowledge and quality of UK graduates in relation to graduates of other countries in the views of the respondents. In particular, it was previously seen that E1 had a perception that UK universities focus on the quality rather than quantity of graduates. In this sense, his view shows that he is inclined to have negative perceptions of US higher education because US universities operate like businesses, even though he graduated from a US university. However, he also noted that UK graduates may not be suitable for working in the business sector.

Individuality and reserve was another perception. Three respondents agreed on this view. They mentioned that UK graduates were trained to work individually; for example, Ph.D. graduates studied by themselves for a long period of time because no coursework was required. This kind of training made these graduates comfortable with working individually rather than in teams. E7 also commented that:

“UK graduates have their own character in that they do not open up to or do not get on well with others quickly. They have some forms of English patterns and they keep their distance.”

This view may reflect the reserved nature of the British people (Montgomery, 2010).

UK graduates were also regarded as good thinkers, as commented on by respondents from OHEC and a private university:

“Dr. Krissanapong Keeratikorn, who graduated from Glasgow, and Prof. Dr. Adul Wiriyawejakul, who graduated from Oxford, they are scientists. I saw these two persons and was interested in their speech. They have thoughtful speech. They give speeches from deep thought which are easy to understand.” (E3, male, OHEC)

Also:

“I guess Mr. Anan Panyarachoon (ex-prime minister) graduated from the UK because he is a good thinker. I notice the way he thinks and it is unlike the American way of thinking in that it is more rational and principled. This goes back to what I said before; that education fulfils the graduates’ pattern of having principles and logic.” (E1, male, private university)

From these two comments, it can be seen that the thinking logic of graduates from the UK is a distinctive characteristic which the respondents can identify and differentiate from among other scholars. A study by Lord and Dawson (2002) indicates that learning and teaching in the UK is student-centred, giving students more opportunities for discussions. There is a high possibility that this learning style transfers to university students and remains a characteristic even after graduation.

Another perception of UK graduates was that they had a strong sense of ethics. A respondent from a private university stated that the UK higher education teaches students to have a sense of moral ethics and principles which differs from the US as the latter focuses on success and materialism. He added that this was seen when

“Working with UK graduates, these people have some limitations and ethical principles which are not suitable for the business sector” (E1, male, a private university).

This respondent was a US alumnus and the only respondent who mentioned this perception. Furthermore, he was the only respondent in the in-depth interviews who had previously worked for several famous companies in Thailand. Many studies of higher education have not researched ethical issues in relation to UK higher education and higher education in other countries.

In addition to ethics, the ability to trust in the quality of graduates was raised by a male respondent from a private university. In his opinion, the ongoing trust in the UK higher education system results in a corresponding ability to trust in graduates from UK universities, as shown in the following statement:

“If we trust in its admissions system of ‘good input’ plus ‘good operating process’, we can trust that the output must be qualified graduates... I do not believe that the British education system is ‘easy to get in to but difficult to get out of’...”. (E4, male, private university)

This comment shows that the perception of trust comes from the admissions system applying strong policies on recruiting students into its system. Lawley and Perry’s study (1998) also confirms the general perception that UK universities are hard to get in to, from the points of view of both Thais and Malaysians.

The final perception of UK graduates was that they were polymaths, as commented on by a respondent from OHEC. Two former prime ministers were selected as examples of this. The following statement supports this view:

“...M.R. Kurkrit Pramoj and Mr. Abhisit Vejjajiva, for example, British education formed them to be polymaths. I accept that they are smart... They are polymaths and they can connect the past, the present and the future to solve problems.” (E8, male, OHEC)

This study has found a variety of perceptions of UK graduates. However, only three of these have also been found to be perceptions of UK higher education: knowledge and quality, individuality and the idea of ‘Puu Dee’. These three may be

the most distinctive perceptions of UK higher education and students who have graduated from UK universities.

4.5 Perceptions of Other Countries' Compared to the UK

Many countries have entered the international higher education market. These countries are competitors of the UK. Evidence suggests that the US is the leader in the market, followed by the UK, Germany, France and Australia, (UIS, 2012a). Understanding perceptions of higher education in other countries from the point of view of respondents who have experience of overseas higher education may be an opportunity to indicate who the competitors in the market are. Then it can be discovered how these competitors are perceived compared to the UK, leading to the possibility of planning suitable marketing strategies for competing with them. In these interviews the respondents were free to comment on any country.

4.5.1 The United States

As the US is a major competitor of the UK, it was not surprising that five respondents mentioned their perceptions of US higher education, as shown in Table 4.6. Australian Education International (AEI) (2011) has shown that the US is viewed as having the highest quality education system among many education exporter countries, from students in Thailand, China, India and Vietnam. However, the results in this chapter may contradict the AEI results (2011).

Table 4.6: Perceptions of US Higher Education

Factors	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9
Lower quality than UK education	✓		✓	✓					
Different accreditations across a single university		✓							
Variety of courses and universities offered	✓			✓					
More flexibility in the education system	✓								
Slow educational development						✓			

Source: Author

In the previous sections it was seen that when many respondents gave their views of UK higher education and its graduates they automatically made a comparison with US education. For example, they referred to the admissions system, the variety/class of universities, and the degree to which they were easy to get in to and easy to get out of. These views confirmed that US education was perceived as lower in quality than UK education. Furthermore, a respondent from OHEC commented that:

“... If I ranked the world university ranking, I would rank US higher education second in the world university ranking, after the UK, because I have a lot of experience of these two countries.” (E3, male, OHEC)

A respondent felt that the US higher education operates like a business in that:

“The admissions systems focus on the quantity of international students, like ordinary businesses.” (E1, male, private university)

Additionally, although the accreditations of US universities are generally accepted, a respondent felt that one particular university might have different accreditation levels:

“The quality accreditation of a US university may not cover the whole university, it covers only some faculties; for example, in Harvard University the most famous faculties are the Business School and the Law School, while other faculties do not have the same accreditation.” (E2, male, public university)

Another general perception of US higher education was that it was famous only in a variety of courses such as the sciences and technology, the social sciences and business studies, as commented on by two respondents from private universities. For example, a respondent commented that:

“Thai students would like to study in America more than in other countries because in America there are enormous numbers of universities with a variety of courses and standards to choose from.”

(E1, male, private university)

This view is consistent with the results of the Institute of International Education (IIE) 2011 prepared by Chow (2011) in that, according to the IIE, the majority of respondents from Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America see the US as having a wide range of schools and programmes. Similar results were also found in the study by Lawley and Perry (1998). Additionally, the same respondent in this study also commented that US higher education has more flexibility in studying than the UK; therefore, many people in Thailand may prefer the American system.

Although the US is the market leader, there is a warning that the economic crisis in the US has impacted on its slow educational development and some small to medium-sized universities have suffered from a decreased number of international students. This is a challenge to the country’s competitive position in the global market.

In term of US graduates, the data show that many respondents had positive perceptions of Thai students who had graduated in the US, as shown in Table 4.7. One of the respondents commented that US graduates were better entrepreneurs than graduates from other countries because they were more flexible and more adaptable in their work, although they did not have very strong business ethics.

Table 4.7: Perceptions of US Graduates

Factors	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9
Entrepreneurial skill	✓								
Have broader knowledge of teaching skills		✓						✓	
Teamwork skills					✓				

Source: Author

Furthermore, the views of two respondents supported the notion that US graduates are very good at teaching. For example:

“...graduates from the US are regarded as having broad knowledge, while their UK and Australian counterparts are regarded as having narrower but deeper knowledge. This is because US graduates are required to attend classes before moving to their research.” (E2, male, public university)

“They are better at teaching than UK graduates.” (E8, male, OHEC)

This perception may result from their experiences of carrying out two years of coursework in their Ph.D. studies, which differs from the UK.

Finally, US graduates were also seen as being very good at working in teams rather than individually, as commented on by a public university president who graduated in the US.

4.5.2 Germany

Germany was another country that was seen as having good-quality higher education by a respondent from OHEC. As shown in Table 4.8, the interview results suggest that there are many different groups of specialist universities, e.g. research or technological. Furthermore, the strength of German universities is that they focus on producing graduates who specialize in a specific area, especially in engineering.

Table 4.8: Perceptions of German Higher Education

Factors	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9
Different groups of universities			✓						
Specialising in specific areas			✓						

Source: Author

Concerning perceptions of graduates from German universities as seen in Table 4.9, two respondents commented that they had German characteristics such as rigidity, punctuality, commitment and perseverance. According to a respondent from a private university (E1), these characteristics may be absorbed by students

from German culture and society. Furthermore, studying in Germany meant gaining the benefit of knowing both the English and German languages which is superior than studying in the UK. Moreover, the same respondent took the view that students who graduated in Germany were more likely to be successful entrepreneurs.

Table 4.9: Perceptions of German Graduates

Factors	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9
Having German characteristics	✓							✓	
Knowing the German and English languages			✓						
Entrepreneurial skills			✓						

Source: Author

4.5.3 The Commonwealth Countries of Australia and New Zealand

As can be seen in Table 4.10, four respondents named the Commonwealth countries of Australia and New Zealand. Australia and New Zealand were regarded as having a similar higher education system to the UK by three respondents. A close relationship between human resources in higher education in Australia, New Zealand and the UK was found; for example, E8 commented that former chancellors of Oxford and Cambridge came from New Zealand. The general perception of being commonwealth countries which have similar professional bodies to the UK benefits Australia and New Zealand, as found in the research by Lawley and Perry (1998). Australia was one of the top five most popular destination countries in 2011 for overseas students (OECD, 2011b; Atlas of Student Mobility, 2011). OECD statistics (2011b) indicate that Australia, New Zealand and Russia have become the three most important new players on the international education market since these countries have increased their market share of international students by 2 per cent. These statistics confirm that Australia and New Zealand are two major competitors of UK higher education.

Table 4.10: Perceptions of Australian and New Zealand Higher Education

Factors	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9
Similar higher education system to the UK		✓		✓				✓	
Close relationship between their human resources and the UK's								✓	
Multinational country and international students welcomed and promoted by New Zealand universities					✓				
Lack of traditional knowledge		✓							

Source: Author

Another respondent commented that the strength of New Zealand was its multinational nature. Since this multinational country has been promoted internationally, overseas students have found that they are more welcome in local society than in the UK.

For Australia, however, there was a negative view of the multinational origins of lecturers, as commented on by a respondent from public university in the following statement:

“Although the Australian higher education system has used the UK system, the majority of lecturers come from foreign countries such as southern Asia, Singapore and China. This pattern suggests a lack of traditional knowledge in comparison to the UK and these lecturers are not permanent because they seek to move to UK universities before moving to US universities as a final destination.” (E2, male, public university)

Concerning the perceptions of graduates (Table 4.11), a vice-president from a private university commented that graduates from Australia and New Zealand were seen to have similar qualifications to graduates from the UK because they used English. Two respondents from public universities commented that graduates from these countries had a narrow but deep knowledge base, similar to that of UK graduates.

Table 4.11: Perceptions of Australian and New Zealand Graduates

Factors	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9
Similar qualifications to UK graduates		✓		✓				✓	

Source: Author

Although many respondents in these interviews had positive views of the quality of Australian and New Zealand higher education in that they were of similar quality to UK higher education, Australia and New Zealand were perceived of as having a lower quality education system than the UK in the study by AEI (2011).

4.5.4 Japan

The results in Table 4.12 show that Japan was mentioned by four respondents. Three of these said that they had an impression of high educational standards; for example, Japanese universities pushed their students to develop international experience by supporting funding for international conferences. From their comments, it can be assumed that although Japan is an Asian country, its higher education has been improved to the same level as many education exporting countries. Information provided by Morgan (2011) shows that Japanese universities perform well in terms of reputation as five Japanese universities are in the top 100 by reputation, making the country's performance better than Canada and Australia but just behind the US and the UK.

Table 4.12: Perceptions of Japanese Higher Education

Factors	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9
High educational standards				✓	✓			✓	
Safety									✓
Knowledge compatible with Asian countries									✓

Source: Author

Another respondent from a public enterprise observed that the country was safe, that Japanese higher education was compatible with Asian countries, and that these factors could be strengths of Japan's higher education.

Table 4.13: Perceptions of Japanese Graduates

Factors	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	E6	E7	E8	E9
Having Japanese characteristics	✓				✓				
Similar qualifications to the US and UK					✓				✓

Source: Author

The interview data in Table 4.13 show that working with Thai students who have graduated in Japan was seen positively by three respondents. A respondent from a private university commented on Japanese characteristics:

“Graduates from Japan are trained to obey, work hard, have good team-working skills and respect for seniority. This is because the students were in a Japanese university’s environment and were trained according to its environment.” (E1, male, private university)

Another respondent also confirmed that students who graduated from Japanese universities worked harder and more seriously than graduates from the UK. These characteristics perhaps reflect Japanese characteristics that the students brought with them when they returned to Thailand. In addition to mentioning Japanese characteristics, two respondents also revealed that the knowledge level of graduates from Japan is considered to be the same as that of graduates from the US and the UK.

Many countries were described as having a good quality of higher education by many respondents; however, a male respondent from a public university did not exemplify any specific country. He believed that “... educational quality is not so different between these countries” (E7, male, public university), and that, at present, education exporting countries know that education is an important resource so they focus on improving educational quality to maintain competitiveness in the market.

In summary, comments were made on the higher education of these five countries: the US, Germany, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. These interview data

suggest, on one hand, that higher education in these countries is perceived as having some distinct characteristics by the respondents which may make them equal to UK higher education. On the other hand, the interview information suggests that these countries could be important competitors for UK higher education. It is interesting that Japan is the only Asian country named by the respondents, whereas the rest are all Western. This may imply that higher education in Japan is given the same regard as that in Western countries. The data from OECD (2011c) also show that Japan is the only Asian country in the top ten study destinations for international students. Statistics from the Office of the Civil Service Commission, Thailand (OCSC) (2005) indicate that Japan is the second-favourite destination of Thai students sponsored by the Royal Thai Government, after the US.

4.6 Recommended Countries for Scholarship Students

Many Thai public organizations, especially in the university sector, have government scholarships or their own scholarships for their staff and prospective staff to study overseas in order to accomplish human resource development. Due to the fact that the respondents were in the highest positions in their organizations, they had responsibilities for managing and planning human resources. Therefore, the respondents were asked whether there was a particular country they recommended to their scholarship students/staff. The data from the interview may suggest implications for the trend in scholarship policies in Thai universities in recent years.

In general, the data from the in-depth interview indicate that eight respondents did not recommend any particular country. They said that there were criteria which each organization needed to take into consideration. Some of them suggested that it depended on the different priorities of each organization. One respondent from a private university said that:

“It does not matter which country: the UK, the US or Australia. The first priority and policy is which area of study; secondly, the education system; thirdly, the expense.” (E4, male, private university)

A further comment went as follows:

“We won’t let our staff study abroad if the area of study is available in Thailand. If it is necessary to study abroad, we have to make sure that their supervisors have a reputation in their research topic and their universities are also ranked among the top world universities.” (E3, male, OHEC)

In addition, two respondents preferred to spread out their staff over several destinations, for the following reason:

“... I like the variety of countries our lecturers graduated in because they create diversity and a variety of new ideas in our organization when they come back...” (E5, male, public university)

This was supported by another respondent from OHEC, who said that:

“I usually tell my subordinates that, if they graduate in Germany or Sweden, they are somebody. In contrast, if they graduate in the UK or the US, where many people graduate, they are just another graduate.” (E8, male, OHEC)

Just one respondent, from a public university, preferred the US to other countries. This respondent commented that the US education system is more suitable for the Thai education sector because of the broader knowledge it offers, which benefits teaching. In contrast, the UK education system offers narrower but deeper knowledge.

It is clear from the illustrations above that the majority of respondents did not have a particular country preference in mind, with just one respondent recommending the US. Although many positive perceptions of UK higher education were

expressed among the respondents in the earlier section of this chapter, these appear not to have led to respondents preferring the UK to other countries. The interview information in this chapter suggests that a variety of factors are involved when considering sending scholarship students/staff to study overseas and that these have to be taken into account more than personal perceptions. These factors include areas of study, course expense, course availability in Thailand and the spread of knowledge.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter presents the findings from qualitative research using in-depth interviewing. The respondents are nine executives from the higher education and public enterprise sectors in Thailand. The findings of this chapter fulfil the first objective of this study: to identify the perception of UK higher education among executives in Thailand's higher education

The main results are summarized in Table 4.14. The results from the interviews suggest that the majority of respondents have positive perceptions of the reputation of UK higher education. UK universities are regarded as conservative, encouraging individuality and bestowing 'Puu Dee' but also expensive. The most common perception of graduates from UK universities, as mentioned by respondents, is that they have high levels knowledge and quality, as well as embodying the concept of 'Puu Dee'. These perceptions of UK higher education and graduates indicate that British education may be superior to that of some countries. Perceptions of other countries' higher education, e.g. the US, Germany and two Commonwealth countries, as well as graduates from these countries, were also presented in this chapter. In particular, each country has some strengths in its higher education; for example, Australia and New Zealand were found to have similar higher education systems to the UK and their graduates had similar qualifications. In addition, as the respondents were policy makers, they were asked whether they would recommend any particular country to their scholarship

students/staff for overseas study. Although the respondents had positive perceptions of UK higher education, the data from the interviews suggest that the majority of respondents did not recommend the UK or any other particular country to scholarship students/staff because of the different priorities or policies of each organization.

The results of the qualitative research (an interview of seventeen students in a provincial UK university) are reported in the next chapter.

Table 4.14: Results Summary

UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • good reputation for educational quality • very expensive • UK institutes are perceived as conservative • bestow 'Puu Dee' and graduates are perceived as 'Puu Dee Ang Krit' • graduates have a sense of ethics, high level of knowledge and quality, individuality and reserve, are good thinkers, can be trusted and are polymaths
US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • less well-perceived than UK higher education • different accreditations in a single university • variety of courses • variety of standards and quality • graduates have a sense of entrepreneurship and are good at teamwork • graduates have broad knowledge which is good for teaching
Australia and New Zealand	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • similar higher education systems to the UK • close human resource relationships with the UK • NZ a multinational country and international students are welcome • Australia has multinational lecturers so there is a lack of traditional knowledge • graduates have similar qualifications to the UK
Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • produces graduates who specialize in a specific area • benefits from learning both English and German languages • graduates are good entrepreneurs • graduates are rigid, punctual and committed
Japan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high educational standards like the US and UK but more compatible with Asian countries • safe country • graduates trained to obey, work hard and have good teamwork skills • graduates have similar qualifications to the US and the UK

Source: Author

Chapter Five

Decision Making and Expectations of Students

“Higher education is only going to become more global. Britain needs to make sure that it maintains quality and doesn’t get caught out by new competition. We must sharpen up.”

David Green, vice-chancellor of Nottingham University
(*The Economist*, 2010)

5.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to research objectives 2 and 5, namely:

Objective 2: To investigate factors relating to students’ decision making regarding studying in the UK

Objective 5: To investigate the expectation - experience gap that current Thai students experience in relation to UK higher education.

With regard to these objectives, this expectation phase is designed to help understand the decision-making factors and the expectations of Thai students studying in the UK, as mentioned in the methodology chapter. It is also designed to be a case study of Thai students at a provincial UK university; seventeen students participated in this study.

Students’ decision-making about educational choices is crucial because the competition between education exporter countries is becoming more intense (Lawley and Perry, 1998). Since new countries have entered the global market, international students have more choices of studying overseas. Therefore, the market share of traditional education export countries, including US, UK and Germany, has declined. Understanding of how international students choose to study in the UK and what factors influence them create an opportunity to gain a better market share.

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) have presented “push and pull” factors influencing international students’ choices of education. Push factors operate when students make a decision to undertake international education, while pull factors get involved when students choose a destination country and an institution (Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). Although many factors have been reported as push-pull factors, previous studies have not examined the importance of these factors in terms of their impacts on students’ choices. In addition, the major studies in this area have been focused mainly on Asian students studying in Australian universities (e.g. Lawley and Perry, 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2003). Therefore, this study tries to elicit how each factor influences Thai students’ decision making at each stage of choosing to study in a UK university.

Undertaking a qualitative study of students’ expectations of UK universities is important. This is because many previous studies have been based solely on the perception of service quality or, if they have compared expectations and perceptions, they have collected the data in cross-sectional way which may lead to bias. Given this, a longitudinal study is required, especially before students have real university experiences, in order to track how expectations have been formed (Rowley, 1997). Hence, this study interviews students twice (before university and at university), following Rowley’s suggestion about “the need for higher education institutions to gather information on students’ expectations not only during their time at university but also at the point of arrival and, if possible, beforehand so that it is possible to track the development of expectations” (Rowley, 1997: 11). Additionally, Barnes (2007) has stated that better research into higher education service quality using an inductive approach is required in order to obtain further qualitative insights.

This chapter will present the results of the first phase of this qualitative study, looking at students’ expectations of UK universities. The second phase, looking at students’ experiences, is presented in the next chapter.

This chapter is comprised of three sections. The first section gives a summary of the students’ demographic profiles. In the second section, the results of the

students' decision-making factors in relation to countries, universities and what students get from the degree will be presented. Thirdly, the results on students' expectations of university service quality will be analysed. Service quality includes location, the quality of the teaching and teaching facilities, support staff, libraries/computing and IT, accommodation and social life.

5.2 The Demographic Profile

Table 5.1, below, presents a demographic profile of the students who participated in the interviews. Out of the 17 respondents, 3 were male and 14 female. These 17 Thai students were reached through convenience sampling from 25 Thai students undertaking a master's degree in the 2010-11 academic year at a UK university. The respondents were between 20 and 29 years old, except for R16, a female respondent, who was 36. Of those respondents, thirteen were on business studies courses, two were studying psychology, one was from a humanities department and the last was studying engineering. In terms of financial support, only three students had scholarships, while the rest were funded by their parents. The data revealed that the majority of these students had work experience before starting their master's degrees and had friends and family members who had graduated in the UK.

Table 5.1: Demographic Profiles of the Interviewees

No	Gender	Age	Level of current study	Area of study	Financial Support	From	Work Experience	Friend/ Family member graduated from the UK	Next Interview
R1	Female	20-29	Master's	Business	Parents	Bangkok	✓ 6 months	✓	✓
R2	Female	20-29	Master's	Business	Parents	Bangkok	✓ 8 months	✗	✓
R3	Female	20-29	Master's	Business	Parents	Bangkok	✓ 1.4 years	✓	✓
R4	Female	20-29	Master's	Business	Parents	Bangkok	✓ 6 months	✓	✓
R5	Male	20-29	Master's	Business	Parents	Bangkok	✗	✓	✓
R6	Female	20-29	Master's	Humanities	Parents	Bangkok	✓ 3 years	✓	✓
R7	Female	20-29	Master's	Business	Thomson Reuters + self-funded	Bangkok	✓ 2 years	✓	✓
R8	Female	20-29	Master's	Business	Private Company	Bangkok	✓ 3 years	✓	✓
R9	Female	20-29	Master's	Business	Parents	Bangkok	✓ 2 years	✓	✓
R10	Female	20-29	Master's	Engineering	Parents	Bangkok	✓	✓	✓
R11	Male	20-29	Master's	Psychology	Parents	Bangkok	✓ 2 years	✓	✓
R12	Female	20-29	Master's	Business	Parents	Central	✓ 2 years	✗	✓
R13	Female	20-29	Master's	Business	Parents	Bangkok	✓ 2 years		✓
R14	Female	20-29	Master's	Business	Parents	Bangkok	✗	✗	✓
R15	Female	20-29	Master's	Psychology	Parents	Bangkok	✗	✗	✓
R16	Female	36	Master's	Business	Thai Gov.	East	✓ 12 years	✓	✓
R17	Male	20-29	Master's	Business	Parents	Bangkok	✗	✓	✓

Source: Author

5.3 Student Decision Making

In this section, the study will attempt to gain insights into how the students made their decision to study in a particular country and institution and which factors influenced their decision making. This will meet objective two of the research.

5.3.1 Decision to Select the Country

Table 5.2: Decision to Select the Country

Respondent	Duration and Cost	Country characteristics				British Accent	Recommendation from friends and relatives	Course	Change	Reputation and quality	Entry requirements	Condition of scholarship
		Travel	Socialization	Technology and knowledge	Football							
R1	✓					✓						
R2	✓											
R3	✓					✓						
R4	✓	✓								✓		
R5	✓				✓						✓	
R6	✓						✓					
R7	✓											
R8	✓											✓
R9			✓									
R10	✓		✓									
R11											✓	
R12	✓	✓									✓	
R13				✓		✓						
R14			✓				✓					
R15	✓								✓			
R16				✓								✓
R17	✓							✓				

Source: Author

According to the results of the interviews, Thai students selected studying in the UK for many reasons, including course duration and cost, country characteristics, entry requirements, scholarship availability, the British accent, and the reputation and quality of the education, as well as other factors such as seeking change and word of mouth about certain institutions. These factors are summarized in Table 5.2.

Out of the seventeen respondents, 12 mentioned that the main reason they decided to study for a master's degree in the UK was the short duration of study and the cost. Master's degrees last only nine months to one year, so the respondents felt they were saving time. One comment was:

“...I chose to study in the United Kingdom because the duration of the course is only one year. It saves me time because the course in the United States or in Thailand takes two years but here it is one year only, so I chose here...” (R3, female, business student)

The quote above indicates that course duration has an impact on students' decision making as it encourages students to study for a master's degree in the UK. It appears UK master's degree courses are shorter than in competitor countries such as the US, Australia or even students' home countries (Lawley and Perry, 1998; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003). It is possible that before making a decision to study in the UK these students looked at how long it would take to obtain a similar master's degree in the US, Australia or even Thailand. This result is consistent with those of Back, Davis and Olsen (1997) in their study of students deciding to study abroad. They found that the time taken to complete a programme of study was an important consideration for students as it affected the total cost of studying.

A similar comment came from another respondent, who initially wanted to study on a language course for nine months but changed her mind because, as she explained:

“...At the beginning I planned to study a language course for nine months but my mum told me that studying on a language course for nine months was too long. She said to me, ‘why don't you study for a master's degree instead because it takes only one year’, so I changed to a master's degree. Thus, I can get a degree without wasting my time...” (R2, female, business student)

As can be seen from the above quotation, the duration of study was the most important factor for her and her mother in terms of choosing a country.

Furthermore, the duration of study has an economic effect for some students. Although the cost of living and studying in the UK is quite high, it can be cheaper to do a one-year course here than a two-year course in another country (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003).

“I had to choose between the UK and the US because they are both very good in finance studies and business management but I made decision for the UK because the course is only one year so the cost is lower than in the US. If I had chosen the US, I would have had to pay study costs for two years.” (R5, male, business student)

And

“It is a money matter; I have to pay more if I go to America.” (R10, female, engineering student)

These two comments show that there is a strong relationship between the duration of the course and the cost of study, in that that the shorter the course, the lower the study and living costs. Lawley and Blight (1998) support this result. They found that the time taken to complete a course is important for students because the longer it takes the more money they have to pay. They stated that for students for whom cost was an issue, a quicker course was seen as good.

The depreciation of the pound sterling also has an effect according to one female respondent, who stated:

“...This year the pound devalued. My family told me that if I wished to study overseas I had to go this year. If I had waited until next year, the pound might have appreciated and I would not have been able to go...” (R6, female, humanities student)

Taken together, the duration of the course, living costs and the depreciation of the pound sterling were the most significant reasons why the students in this study

decided to study in the UK. It appears that this result may go against the results of the British Council's Student Decision Making Survey (*Times Higher Education*, 2010b) and Merrick and Robinson (2006). They have found that the main reason for international students choosing UK higher and further education is the quality of the UK's education system. Additionally, the British Council's Student Decision Making Survey concluded that tuition costs were not a strong motivating factor as only one in ten students cited it as a factor in choosing a country (*Times Higher Education*, 2010b). This is in contrast with the result in this study that the cost of study has a major influence. However, the data from the British Council's study were gathered from an online survey and at an education exhibition with more than 115,000 students from 200 different countries in an attempt to provide an understanding of complex and sophisticated factors in higher education (*Times Higher Education*, 2010b). This is on a much larger scale than this researcher's study, which interviewed only seventeen students.

Country characteristics are also a significant factor, with 8 respondents citing this as a reason for choosing the UK. Of those eight students, three agreed that they preferred the UK because they believed that socializing in this country was better than in the US. For example, "everybody in my family studied in America and they found that there were some problems about friends, so I was told that there was a bad social problem in America" (R9, female, business student). Another two respondents commented that, living in the UK, they had greater opportunities to travel to Europe. For example: "it is very easy and more convenient to go to European countries" (R12, female, business student). Other country characteristics that were mentioned included the technology and knowledge which has been transferred from England to Thailand. This can be seen in the following quotes:

"...It is one of the European countries from which Thailand received European knowledge, thinking and ideas, such as buses and logos... it is like a copy of the transportation system, isn't it? Drive either right or left but why we drive on the same side as the British I would like to know..." (R13, female, business student)

and

“...Accounting in Thailand, which is my job, is based on the British system. The majority of accounting knowledge has been transferred from Britain, so Britain should be the best option for me.” (R16, female, business student)

These two statements suggest that Thailand has adopted much technology and knowledge from the UK. Thus, the perception of UK education and technology persists and reinforces the idea that Thai people should get academic knowledge from the UK (Vosissopa, 1979). The final country characteristic cited by the respondents related to the country's most famous, namely football. One male respondent stated: “I chose the UK because I personally would like to see a match with Manchester United and I believe that football may be a factor in men choosing this country” (R5, business student).

The British accent was another reason to choose the UK. Although there are many accents among English-speakers, such as British, American and Australian accents, three students preferred the British accent to its counterparts. One of them believed that:

“If I graduate in the United Kingdom, I will have the British accent. It is more ok than Australians’.” (R3, female, business student)

To the best knowledge of the author, many studies in this field have found that language is an important factor when selecting a host country (e.g. Lawley and Perry, 1998; Lord and Dawson, 2002; Russell, 2005). However, accent has never been found to be an important factor.

Students also commented on the ease of entry to UK universities. Two business students (R5, male and R12, female) and a psychology student (R11, male) claimed that they chose the UK because there was no requirement other than IELTS and this made it easier than the US. This is due to the fact that US entry requirements are difficult to meet because both IELTS and GMAT are required. This requirement may make Thai students look for alternative countries with fewer requirements for course entry.

A recommendation from another person also affected students' decision making. Two students mentioned that they came to study in the UK because of recommendations from relatives and friends. For example, R14, a female business student, commented:

“At the beginning I was choosing between the UK and the US. Fortunately, my family knew a military attaché of Thailand in the UK. I felt that he was close to my family. So my parents did not worry too much about safety here and, if any problems happened to me, they knew that he could help and be a contact”.

A similar comment came from R6, a female humanities student:

“My aunt's son, who graduated from the UK, told me that studying in the UK is good and the course is one year. It's quite short and saves me money.”
(R6)

These quotations confirm that recommendations from close friends or relatives play an important role when students choose their country of education. Additionally, the interview data reveal that parents get involved in the country-choosing process of their child and that they feel more comfortable letting their child go to a country where they have people who they can rely on and trust if they need help. These results confirm the study by Pimpa (2003, 2005) on the effect of family on Thai students' choices. However, the distinction between this study and Pimpa's (2003, 2005) study is that Pimpa's (2003, 2005) results came from a focus group of Thai students who were studying in an Australian university and the factors found resulted from parents influencing their child to study in Australia. Interestingly, although the demographic backgrounds (Table 5.1) in this researcher's study show that twelve students had friends and family member who had graduated in the UK, only two students mentioned recommendations from relatives and friends. This may mean that recommendations from relatives and friends do not have a strong impact on students' country decisions. This contradicts Pimpa's (2002a, 2002b, 2004) results, which found that students whose parents graduated overseas or who had relatives in Australia were expected by

their parents and relatives to study there, and it was the second most-influential factor in their choices of international education.

Other minor reasons that the interviewees mentioned affecting their choice of the UK included the following:

- The lack of availability of a similar course in the US:
“The course I study (econometrics) is not widely available in America; that’s why I came to the UK...” (R17, male, business student)
- Seeking new challenges in a new country:
“I had experience as an exchange student in America and I have travelled through the US Already, so it was not exciting anymore. I have never been to Europe; I think this is a good reason for me to come to the UK.” (R15, female, psychology student)
- The reputation and quality of the education:
“When I asked my colleagues about studying in the UK, everybody said that it was quite good and people accepted its reputation.” (R4, female, business student)
- Scholarship conditions:
“My choices were the US, the UK or Australia. After considering duration of study, the US was rejected because after graduation I had to work an equal number of years to those I took for the scholarship. I had two choices left: either the UK or Australia. If the UK, there was a greater variety of choices of institute in the UK on the list given by the sponsor in Thailand.” (R8, female, business student)

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) and Tarry (2008) applied the push-pull model to research students’ decision making about higher education (see Table 5.3). Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) described pull factors as host country factors that influence international students to seek higher education there. When deciding to come to a country, the pull factors are: knowledge of the host country, recommendations from friends and relatives, cost of study, the environment in the host country, geographic proximity and social links. However, in our research a

variety of factors encouraging Thai students to select the UK were found. Two of these are similar to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002): living and study costs, and recommendations from relatives and friends. One factor —language - is similar to the results of the study by Tarry (2008) in that the Thai students chose the UK to improve their language skills. Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) found that geographic proximity had an effect on Indonesian students choosing Australia as their destination because of its close proximity but this factor did not have an impact on students from Taiwan, India and China for Australian institutions. Research by Hill, Romm and Patterson (1992) also found that proximity to home was frequently cited as one of the reasons why international students chose Australia. In our research, geographic proximity was not reported as a reason to study in a UK university from our samples. The majority of respondents confirmed that the most frequent reason for choosing the UK was the duration of the course.

It should be noted that Mazzarol and Soutar's (2002) results were based on students from four Asian countries studying in Australia. Australia is close to Asia and moderately close to these students' countries of origin. Furthermore, all of these four countries, China, Taiwan, Indonesia and India, were once colonized by western powers (Tarry, 2008). Therefore, they may have undergone some cultural absorption from the West, which is different from the situation in Thailand. The results from this study indicate that the reasons why international students seek a particular host country may differ according to their home country backgrounds and the geographic proximity between countries.

In addition, while the quality of the UK's higher education system has been claimed as a major reason for international students selecting the UK as a higher education destination (Merrick and Robinson, 2006; *Times Higher Education*, 2010b), our study found that only one out of the seventeen students chose to study in the UK because of this.

Table 5.3: Comparison of Country Decision's Results

Mazzarol and Soutar (2002)	Author	Tarry (2008)
Pull	Pull	Pull
Knowledge of the host country	British English	Improve language skills
Recommendation from friends and relatives	Recommendations from friends and relatives	Overseas experience
Cost	Cost	Increased status from recognised qualification
Environment	Entry requirements	University ranking
Geographic proximity	Duration of study	Reputation of university
Social links	Lack of course in US	Economic capital
	Negative experiences in other countries	Pull (from Thailand)
	Quality of education	Economic factors
	Scholarship condition	Cultural and social factors
	UK university choices	

Source: Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Tarry (2008) and Author

5.3.2 Decision to Select a University

The second interview question aimed to get a deeper understanding of how Thai students choose a particular overseas institution. According to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), selecting a university is the second stage in the push-pull model. Here this research is looking at why students chose University D. In general, the interview results found that decision to choose a university was not a one-step process.

The results on how students chose a particular university can be divided into two main categories: internal factors and external factors, as shown in Table 5.4. The internal factors related to the university itself and included university ranking, fast responses from the admissions department, course characteristics, university reputation and university information. The external factors included word of mouth, city characteristics, refusals from other universities and scholarship conditions.

Table 5.4: Decision to Select a University

	Internal factors					External factors			
	Ranking	Fast Response	No dissertation requirement	University reputation	University Information	Word of mouth	City characteristics	Refusal	Conditions Of scholarship
R1	✓	✓							
R2	✓	✓							
R3	✓		✓			✓			
R4	✓					✓			
R5	✓		✓			✓			
R6	✓	✓	✓				✓		
R7						✓	✓	✓	✓
R8	✓					✓		✓	
R9	✓							✓	
R10				✓			✓	✓	
R11	✓	✓	✓						
R12			✓				✓		
R13	✓							✓	
R14	✓					✓			
R15	✓		✓						
R16	✓	✓			✓		✓		✓
R17	✓		✓						

Source: Author

In regard to internal factors, university ranking was mentioned by fourteen out of the seventeen students. Many students agreed that they used the Good University Guide from the *Times Higher Education* newspaper as a source of information on UK universities. Specifically, students lodged their application forms with many universities according to the ranking in *The Times*. These universities were usually in the top 10 or top 20 in their area of study. Sample comments are:

“I looked at the ranking for the last year before I made my decision about a university and University D was the second on the list.” (R5, male, business student)

And:

“Last year University J was the first and University D was the second. But this year D came in first so it is reasonable for me to choose University D.”
(R14, female, business student)

Furthermore, with regard to the ranking of the university, there is a general belief that University D has a good position. This means that its lecturers should be well-qualified, have a good reputation, and be widely-recognised as providing good quality education. Nine students agreed with this idea.

R3, female, business student: “I had a high expectation of qualified lecturers as the university is in the Top 20”.

R4, female, business student: “The higher university ranking, the better the lecturers’ qualifications”.

R6, female, humanities student: “University D is in the Top 10, so the lecturers here should be acknowledged”.

R11, male, psychology student: “I have a high expectation of the lecturers because University D is in the Top 10 of the ranking”.

R16, female, business student: “I have an expectation of quality in the teaching because my school is famous in finance and accounting, and in 2010 it was the first-ranked in finance, so I have high expectations of the teaching quality at the university”.

These comments highlight the fact that students chose the university because teaching expectations were based on the league table. It is clear that university rankings have a positive relationship with the quality of the lecturers and teaching in the university in the minds of respondents. This result supports the research findings of Federkeil (2002) and Hazelkorn (2008) in that students use the ranking as a shortlisting method for university selection. However, it seems that students use the league table in choosing their university without realizing that ranking was comprised from many criteria. Therefore, using the ranking for university selection is may be somewhat risky because it is not be the only indicator used to measure teaching quality and performance.

Additionally, R16, a female scholarship student, explained that her sponsor gave her a list of universities she could choose from, based on *The Times'* list. At this time, university D was the third-ranked university for accounting and finance. These comments suggest that the ranking of a university strongly influences students' decision making about it. Moreover, the data reveal that Thai organizations prefer universities which have good rankings and that university rankings are used as a guideline condition for scholarship students' university selection.

Fast responses were another internal factor when selecting a university. Five students agreed that they chose their university because it gave faster answers or offer letters. One comment was:

“... One good reason for university D was that when I applied I got the offer letter within 10 days. I didn't waste time waiting; I got an opportunity and prepared myself to travel. I could do some other things and moved forward to prepare something else, while with other universities I applied to I might have had to wait for approximately two months before the offer letter arrived. But university D was fast... like... wow, I got it! I think a fast response from a university is better for students when making a decision...” (R1, female, business student)

This comment suggests that fast responses and early confirmations of a place result in more efficient decision making as they give students security. It is obviously critical that required information and fast responses from universities not only impress the students but also create stress-free starts to courses as they can lead to positive perceptions of learning experiences (Mortimer, 1997). If a university is a real business, the degree of its responses to customers may be crucial for success in a highly competitive market.

The results also show that seven students were influenced by there not being a dissertation requirement. One student explained that “I decided to study at this

university because my course was only 9 months and did not require submitting a dissertation and this was the main reason for me” (R12, female, business student).

The two final internal factors were university reputation and university information. Comments on these factors included:

“The agency told me to choose a university which had the name of the city as it would be more reputable; in other words, it would be an old university.”
(R10, female, engineering student)

And:

“I searched for information on university websites and found that University D provided good and sufficient information for prospective students. Photos of geographical features of places, buildings and university accommodation have been provided. These photos looked great. Furthermore, there were short videos interviewing current students at the university and these students looked well and were happy.” (R16, female, business student)

The comment from R10 reveals that the name of university, which used city-of-location naming strategy, had a greatly impact of her decision on choice of university. Peluso and Guido (2012) support that a university name in which integrates the city of location has greater benefits in terms of recognisability, memorability, credibility and preference from the public’s perception than a region-of-location naming university. Additionally, these two illustrations show that students seek as much as information as possible on the university they are going to study in from many sources, including educational agencies and university websites. As mentioned by R10, educational agencies play an important role in giving information and influencing choices of overseas universities by students. The results of the nationwide questionnaire discussed in Chapter 7 support this as they found that 57 per cent of the students used an agency before they made their decision. A study by Harris and Rhall (1993) also found that more than 29 per cent of international students in Australia consulted an agent. In the case of New Zealand, Ward and Masgoret (2004) found that more than 60 per cent of international students in their sample used educational agents to help with their

arrangements to study in New Zealand. Furthermore, it appears that recommendations by educational agencies comprise a communication channel for prospective students. Mazzarol (1998) also confirms that the use of private educational agencies is a critical success factor for educational institutions operating in international markets. Additionally, regarding university websites, as mentioned by R16, a study by Willis and Kennedy (2004) reported that Hong Kong students preferred to use university websites as a source of information to look for general and specific material about courses and costs and to compare courses and programmes provided on-campus and as distance learning. Although Willis and Kennedy's (2004) focus was on foreign universities delivering courses in Hong Kong, its findings are for foreign universities across the world and also support the results of this study.

With regard to external factors, the power of word of mouth played a significant role in the decision to go to a particular university. The outcome reveals that students were informed by both their friends and their Thai bachelor degree lecturers (six students). One respondent stated that:

“Actually, I'd never heard about this university before. Accidentally, I asked my lecturer in my bachelor degree to write a recommendation letter for me, she asked which universities I had applied to, and when I told her she asked me why I was not applying for university D because it is a good university and has a good ranking in *The Times* that Thai people did not realize it. Her daughter had just graduated from university D too. When I went back home I Googled University D and found that it was very famous for finance...” (R14, female, business student)

A similar statement from another female respondent mentioned that “after finding University D was ranked 2nd in finance and accounting, I asked my senior who had just graduated from University D last year and was told that it was good” (R4, female, business student). This suggests that students may ask someone with experience of studying at a certain university to help them make the right decision. It was clear that the power of word of mouth and information from friends affected

students' decision making for a university at this stage. This result is consistent with those of Pimpa (2002a), Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Maringe and Carter (2007), Lord and Dawson (2002), Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Chen and Zimitat (2006), Maringe (2006), Li et al. (2009) and Daily et al., (2010).

Another external factor is city characteristics. When moving overseas, people are likely to pay attention to the weather. Some students stated that they chose city D because the climate was warmer than in other cities. Sample comments are:

“University E is in the north. It is too cold and I don't like the cold weather there. I considered the weather.” (R7, female, business student)

And:

“...another reason that I considered was the geography. City D is located in the south. I did not want to study where it was cold and did not want to go to the city I because I would not get used to the cold weather there. I thought the south would be more suitable for me as it is warmer and I can do more activities.” (R16, female, business student)

From the above quotations, it may be possible to extract the idea that if students are able to choose, climate warmer location will be preferred when making a decision. This result supports the study of Dalglish and Chan (2005) on international students studying in Australia. They found that one important factor in international students choosing Brisbane as a study destination was the warm climate, particularly for students who came from warm countries. Dalglish and Chan's (2005) study used a focus group with a bigger sample than this study (38 students) and respondents from four different backgrounds; namely, African, Chinese, Indian and Thai students at a university in Brisbane, Australia.

There were also further comments regarding city characteristics. A female humanities student stated that she preferred city D to city K because city D was an historic city and a Roman town (R6, female, humanity student). Two students also commented on their preference for city D because of its peace and safety (R10, female, engineering student and R7, female, business student).

Another external factor mentioned by five students was refusals from other universities. It was clear that many students had not made University D their first priority; instead, they applied to many universities at the same time, depending on the ranking in *The Times*, as mentioned earlier. When their first applications were refused, they moved on to university D. For example:

“I did not choose University D as my first priority. I wanted to study at a university in London, such as University F, but I could not get in.” (R7 female, business student)

And:

“...I applied for a finance course at University F, University G, University H and University D... my father wanted me to study at D but I personally preferred F because I wanted to stay in London. Unfortunately, I got a refusal letter from all of them except D” (R13, female, business student).

Refusals from universities can thus influence decision making by making people turn to other possibilities.

The final external factor was scholarship conditions. It appeared that these were one of the reasons for choosing both particular countries and particular universities. A female student got an offer from University E as well as University D but was able to obtain more scholarship money by going to university D (R7, female, business student). Although only two students commented on this factor, it was still an important element to take into consideration.

Taken together, the interviews confirm the idea that before making a decision the students considered the factors mentioned above and weighed them to ensure they made the best choice. The interviews found that all the students had at least two reasons for choosing their university and some students used a complex decision-making process. An example of complex decision making comes from R16, a female scholarship student in a business department:

“My sponsor gave me a list of the universities I could choose from according to *The Times*’ list in the areas of accounting and finance in the year I got the scholarship, which was two years ago (2009). From the ranking’s list, I was permitted to apply within the Top 20 only and University D was the third ranked. Next, another reason why I considered it was the characteristics of city D, which is located in the south of the UK. I did not want to study where it was cold and did not want to go to city I because I would not get used to the cold weather there. I thought the south would be more suitable for me as it is warmer and I can do more activities. I applied to many universities, such as university G and others, but University D was the first university I got an offer letter from and they asked me to pay a deposit to reserve my unconditional offer before the deadline. At that time it was a risky decision for me because I had not yet got an offer letter from the other universities I had applied to. I was not sure at that time whether to say yes or no to University D because D did have a good ranking but all the other universities I was waiting for were lower-ranked than D, except for G. I searched for information on the university’s website and found that University D provided good, sufficient information for prospective students. Photos of geographical features of places, buildings and university accommodation had been provided. These photos looked great. Furthermore, there were short videos of interviews with current students at the university and these students looked well and were happy. I had not received any offer letters from the other universities I applied to and it was near the deadline to pay the deposit for University D. Finally, I decided on D and paid the deposit to the university.”

As can be seen, this student had both internal and external factors to consider before making her choice: university ranking, university information, scholarship conditions, city characteristics and getting a fast response.

In summary, students’ decision making about an appropriate university is a complex process. Another study confirms that Thai students deciding on their choice of university use more than one step (Pimpa, 2002b). The interview results

here show that varieties of possible reasons have to be weighed before making a decision. These reasons include internal factors (from the university itself) such as ranking, university responses, university reputation and information. External factors include word of mouth, city characteristics, refusals from other universities and scholarship conditions, and these also play a significant role in students' decision making. It can thus be seen that the selection of a university is more complex than the selection of a country for some students.

5.3.3 What Will The Students Get From Their Degree?

After asking about students' decision making to choose the country and the university, the study also asked whether there are some benefits and/or expectation after graduating from university. This question is important to the study because it reflects the benefits of obtaining an overseas degree in Thai society. In addition, it can imply general expectations, among both students and their families, held prior to their decision making in relation to higher education. It also attempts to find whether there are some push factors in Thailand that influence students to go overseas.

Five post-graduation benefits were found: career opportunities, overseas experience, knowledge, networking and family pride, as shown in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5: What Students Get From The Degree

Respondent	Career opportunities	Overseas experience	Knowledge	Networking	Pride
R1	✓		✓		
R2	✓				
R3	✓				
R4	✓				
R5	✓				
R6	✓	✓		✓	
R7	✓		✓		
R8	✓	✓			
R9	✓	✓			
R10		✓			
R11	✓		✓	✓	✓
R12	✓	✓			
R13	✓				
R14	✓				
R15	✓		✓		
R16	✓		✓	✓	
R17	✓	✓		✓	

Source: Author

Career opportunities were the most frequently mentioned benefit (sixteen students). In general, the results from the study indicate that these students believed that after graduation they would find a job more easily and hold a higher profile than other candidates. Their parents and families also expected that they would have more opportunities to get a better job and a higher salary than people graduating from Thai institutions.

“After graduating, my family wants me to be smarter than others and hope that I will get a job more easily than people who have graduated from Thai institutes” (R2, female, business student).

“I hope that I can get a job in an international company with a high salary as people have a good perception of UK degrees” (R7, female, business student).

These statements reflect the perception among Thai people that people who hold a degree from overseas have greater social standing than people who graduated in

Thailand. Generally speaking, there is a perception that an overseas degree is more acceptable than a local degree. This may be due to the fact that ordinary people in Thailand generally graduate with a master's degree at present. Therefore, a local master's degree does not make them any different from anyone else. Hence, a master's degree from overseas gives students an edge over other applicants in the market. This social concept is also found in the work of Visisobha (1979), Sinlarat et al. (2007) and Tarry (2008).

For the students who had permanent jobs, the interview data showed that they had an expectation that their English would be improved as they would have more chances to practise English with international friends and at university. They further believed that they would have more chance of getting promoted and earn higher salaries. A female student reflects this perception:

“I would like my English to be improved. In my workplace people who are good at English are promoted faster, work less and gain higher salaries than people who aren't” (R9, female, business student).

Similarly, another female student expected that her English would improve before she went back to work because most of her departmental colleagues had graduated overseas. She hoped that if her English improved she would work more easily and smoothly and with greater confidence.

“I hope the degree will help me work more easily and smoothly. I have been suffering from my poor and limited English because all my colleagues graduated overseas and speak fluent English but I can't” (R8, female, business student).

Since the degree will give them more knowledge and proficiency, it was not surprising that some students with permanent jobs in Thailand also look forward to an opportunity to switch to a career which was more comfortable for them, and possibly a pathway to a Ph.D. degree. One male respondent said:

“It absolutely helps because the job I would like in the future is to be a lecturer in a university, which requires a Ph.D. degree. The master’s degree is a passport to get into an academic career” (R11, male, psychology student).

All of these above quotations indicate that an overseas degree is important for students on study breaks in terms of gaining a successful career. It also shows that there is much competition between friends and colleagues in the workplace as well difficulties at work, and these pressures perhaps force or influence students to get a degree overseas. In other words, competition in the workplace may cause people to study abroad on sabbaticals. This outcome is consistent with Pimpa’s (2002) observation that competition among peers and friends at work made postgraduate students choose to study overseas and many of them believed that (when returning to Thailand) an overseas degree would help them in the competition for higher positions. However, Pimpa’s respondents were Thai students in Australia, rather than in the UK.

The next benefit related to overseas experience. Overseas experience included the opportunity to live overseas and to gain new vision from friends and another society, as commented on by six students. Moreover, parents also wanted their offspring to become full-grown adults. A female student stated:

“My family hopes that I will get more experiences from living overseas such as solving problems, knowing people, looking after myself” (R10, female, engineering student).

Knowledge was another aspect. Five students stated that they expected to gain greater knowledge from their master’s degree. Furthermore, two psychology students, and one business student recounted that:

“I would like to understand people’s thinking processes and what makes people think differently as I study psychology” (R11, male, psychology student).

“... I would like to gain knowledge of psychology as I completed a bachelor’s degree in economics but changed to a master’s degree in psychology, which would possibly be my field of study in a Ph.D” (R15, female, psychology student).

And:

“I would like to gain proficiency in accounting and finance and would like to comprehend the financial crisis in the UK” (R16, female, business student).

These statements indicate that the students were trying to find a proficiency which might be linked to future career opportunities.

Next, the students expected networking. This included connections with both lecturers and friends. Many of the students who participated in the interviews were from business families in which connections were important. One male student is a good example: “My father expects me to get some connections with friends who may be helpful for my business” (R11, male, psychology student). Another female student stated that a connection with her lecturers or supervisors was important. When she goes back to work in an accounting and finance job, a connection with supervisors or lecturers who are proficient would be a benefit and helpful for her career (R16, female, business student).

The last expectation was family pride. This was commented on by one male student, R11, a psychology student:

“My family will be proud of me as I will be the first one in my family to graduate overseas. Before I came, my parents were always asking me ‘when are you going to study overseas?’. Since then, I have known that they had some kind of expectation that I would have an overseas education”.

This comment reflects the fact that overseas education gives important social standing to Thai families. It also reveals that family expectations play an important role in the Thai educational norm that it is better to graduate overseas. This

matches with Pimpa's (2001: 5) study, which shows that "family expectation, in this case, becomes the students' drive to achieve their own and/or their parents' goal". Additionally, family expectations have been reported on in previous studies on the effect of family on Thai students' international education choices (Pimpa, 2003, 2005; Tarry, 2008).

Concerning the concept of 'push-pull' factors, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) stated that "push factors operate within the source country and initiate a student's decision to undertake international study" (p. 82). Based on this definition, it is clear that these post-graduation benefits arising when students return to their home country can be fitted into the push-factor framework which initiates Thai students' overseas study. These factors are: 1) more opportunities to get better jobs and salaries at home, 2) overseas experiences, 3) knowledge, 4) networking and 5) family pride; these differ from the original push factors. The original push factors in the 'push-pull' factor framework of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) were: 1) overseas courses being better than the local ones, 2) finding it difficult to enter local universities, 3) the course not being available at home, 4) wanting a better understanding of the West, and 5) an intention to migrate. Tarry (2008) also reported that a lack of confidence in the Thai education system was key push factor in choosing the US.

In conclusion, the results in this section reveal that students who graduate with master's degrees expect many career benefits when they return home. A degree from a UK university will give them greater status, career progression, salaries, opportunities to switch to other careers and job opportunities. It also gives them an experience of living overseas as well as academic knowledge. They may have an opportunity to form a connection with people they meet in UK and, last but not least, the degree will fulfil family goals.

5.4 Results for Students' Expectations of Universities - Results

As mentioned earlier, the students were asked to explain their overall expectations of university services. A 5-point scale was applied in the interview survey to measure expectations in each category. Students were required to rate their levels of expectation from 1 to 5, where one showed a minimal level of expectation and five showed a maximum level. The high score shows a positive expectation and the low score represents a more negative expectation of the students. These scores are very useful because they may support the interview results in terms of measuring and comparing perceptions of experience in Chapter 6.

The students' expectations are divided into 6 main categories: location, quality of teaching and facilities, support staff, libraries and computing/IT, accommodation and social life. This is in accordance with Athiyaman's (2006) suggestion of using general university characteristics to measure the service quality of higher education. These six categories derive from service quality literature such as that by Kinnell, 1989; Kinnell, 1990; Douglas et al., 2006; McDowell and Montgomery, 2009; Russell, 2005; Arambewela, 2003; Arambewela and Hall, 2006 and Hill, 1995.

As can be seen from Table 5.6, in general, the mean score for overall expectation is 3.88. This number indicates that the students had relatively high expectations of the services provided by the university. The outcome reveals that the highest expectation factor among the students was library quality at 4.41, a value falling between high and highest expectations. On the other hand, expectations of social activities and clubs on campus were the lowest, with a score of 3.

Table 5.6: Student Expectation Scores in 6 Categories

Category	Topic	Expectation Score
1. Location	Geographic location	3.35
	Convenient travel	3.53
	Safety	4.29
2. Quality of Teaching and Teaching Facilities	Quality of Teaching	4.35
	Teaching Support Facilities	4.12
3. Support Staff	Staff Services	3.82
4. Library, Computing and IT	Library	4.41
	Computing and IT	4
5. Accommodation	Accommodation	4
6. Social Life	Social activities and Clubs	3
	Friends	3.77
Overall Mean Score		3.88

Source: Author

5.4.1 Expectations of Location

To find out how place has an impact on students' expectation, it is good to know how different aspects of place, such as geographic location, travelling convenience and safety, link to students' expectations. Students were asked to rate their expectations on a 5-point scale in order to support their views. According to Arambewela (2003), location is commented on as an important factor because it has an impact on the choice of a university and "it is also considered as a facility provided by the university for convenience of students" (p.99). Joseph and Joseph (1997) and Ford et al. (1999) also use location as an indicator of the quality of a university.

5.4.1.1 Expectations Related to Geographical Location

The location of a university may impact on students' expectations in terms of weather and distances from large cities. The mean score for geographic location

was 3.35 (Table 5.7), which is close to neutral. The geographical location expectations are summarized in Table 5.7.

Table 5.7: Expectations of Geographical Location

	Climate	Travel to/from London	No Preference
R1			○
R2		✓	
R3		✓	
R4		✓	
R5		✓	
R6	✓	✓	
R7	✓		
R8			○
R9			○
R10		✓	
R11			○
R12	✓		
R13		✓	
R14	✓	✓	
R15			○
R16	✓	✓	
R17			○
Mean Score 3.35			
✓ = positive expectation			
○ = no preference			

Source: Author

The first expectation related to geographic location is climate. This is because city D is located in southern England; students expected warmer weather than in the other parts of the UK. R6, a female student from a humanities department, stated: “I could not survive in cold weather and my hands would be numb”. Another female student (R14, female, business student) explained that as she knew the south was not as cold as the north, and she did not like the cold weather, she decided against choosing a northern university. This result can be linked with what was found in Section 5.3.2, where students were likely to choose study destinations with climates similar to those at home (Danglish and Chan, 2005).

Another expectation regarding geographic location was how convenient it was to travel to London, as claimed by nine students. London to city D was a 2-hour train journey and this was considered not inconvenient.

On the other hand, many students argued that geographical location was not an issue for them. For example, R9 and R11 mentioned that:

“For me, personally, I did not mind where I lived. Somebody minded about it being too cold or raining too much but for me, I felt that I could adjust myself to anywhere I lived.” (R9, female, business student)

And:

“...geographical location I had never thought about like the others; weather was never a factor I had to think about... I thought I was just coming to study...” (R11, male, psychology student)

These comments reveal that location may not be a preference factor in students' expectation because one-third of the students said that their priority was how good the university was or how famous it was according to rankings.

The results indicate that all the respondents who were concerned about climatic conditions were women; on the other hand, men were less concerned about, or did not pay attention to, the weather. However, the sample in this study may be biased as there were only three men in the interview and three times more women than men. Hence, it is not possible to conclude that gender may be a significant factor in geographical location decisions.

5.4.1.2 Expectations of Convenience of Travel

Concerning their perceptions of the convenience of the university, the students were asked about their perceptions before they arrived at the university for the first time. As can be seen in Table 5.8, twelve respondents answered that they thought travelling to the university from London was convenient but five students disagreed. The majority of students also expected their accommodation to be a

short distance from the university. The mean score came to 3.53, which indicates a relatively high level of expectation. It was also the third least important expectation factor among the students, after activities and clubs and geographical location (see Table 5.6).

Those students who answered positively (12 students) agreed that travelling to city D from London did not worry them because there was a good public transport system in the UK. For example:

“I thought it was convenient because there is train commuting throughout the country. My perception was it was easier than in Thailand as the transport facilities were much better. Thailand has not had a budget to support train facilities...” (R4, female, business student)

And:

“Travelling from Thailand, I thought it was not inconvenient because there were either trains or buses to take” (R17, male, business student).

Table 5.8: Expectations of Convenience of Travel

Respondent	Travelling to/from London Convenient	Travelling to University Short distance
R1	X	✓
R2	✓	X
R3	✓	✓
R4	✓	✓
R5	✓	✓
R6	X	✓
R7	✓	✓
R8	✓	✓
R9	✓	✓
R10	✓	
R11	✓	✓
R12	✓	✓
R13	X	✓
R14	X	✓
R15	X	X
R16	✓	
R17	✓	✓
Mean Score 3.53		
✓ = positive expectation		
X = negative expectation		

Source: Author

Another student said: “Before I travelled I was rarely concerned about travelling because I had a conversation with my agency and was told that after arriving at the airport there was a direct coach to city D. I thought it could not be much trouble” (R8, female, business student). These comments show that students’ expectations of convenient travel to the university developed from many factors. Firstly, they compared it with travelling in their home country. In this case, it can be seen that they believed strongly that transport systems in developed countries were superior to that in their home country. Secondly, the students also contacted educational agencies for any information they required about the university and the information they received increase their sense that travel was convenient. Similarly, research using a Chinese sample has also found that educational agencies are key influencers in terms of forming students’ expectations of overseas programmes (Willis and Kennedy, 2004). This is also in line with research undertaken by Harris and Rhall (1993), Mazzarol (1998) and Ward and Masgoret (2004).

On the other hand, five students believed that travelling to city D was inconvenient. One female student stated that it was difficult for her because the three-hour journey was time-consuming and she had large amounts of luggage to carry with her (R6, female, humanities student). Another female student mentioned that she had negative expectations because of prior foreign experiences; her comment was:

“I thought it was not convenient to travel to city D because I had experience as an exchange student studying in Phoenix, Arizona. It was not convenient in terms of transportation to other cities so I deduced that it would be the same in city D because it was not near London” (R15, female, psychology student).

This comment is a good example of how student expectations may derive from past experiences.

When considering expectations regarding travelling to the university from their accommodation, the outcomes confirms that the majority of students had high expectations of short distances to teaching buildings. Many mentioned that going

from their accommodation to the university should take around 10-15 minutes on foot. For example:

“Don’t think it is too far to walk because it is opposite the university’s entrance and I’ve been told it is a 10 minute walk to the teaching buildings” (R5, male, business student).

And:

“From the website, it is 10 minutes’ walk to the campus. It’s a short distance to walk as I expected from the website information I got” (R14, female, business student).

However, two students had negative expectations of travelling to the university. One of them thought it was around a 30-minute walk and that there was no bus. This comment resulted from experiencing studying in the US, where the accommodation was a long distance away from the university.

As mentioned earlier in this section, as it has one of the lowest levels of expectation after activities and clubs, and geographic location, this is not a major expectation area from the point of view of students. This result is consistent with the results of Joseph and Joseph (1997) and Ford et al., (1999), who found that the location of the university was considered as one of the least-important factors from the point of view of students in New Zealand universities.

5.4.1.3 Expectations of Safety

Safety is another factor considered by international students and their families when students go abroad to study (Chen and Zimitat, 2006; Maringe and Carter, 2007; Yang, 2007; Arambewela and Hall, 2009; Li et al., 2009). Forbes-Mewett et al. (2010) highlight the fact that safety is an issue that is of more concern to parents than students when choosing a study destination. In our results, the majority of the students (16) believed that where they were going to study was a safe place, as shown in Table 5.9, creating an expectation mean score of 4.29, which indicates a highest level of expectation.

Table 5.9: Expectations of Safety

Respondent	Safe
R1	✓
R2	✓
R3	✓
R4	✓
R5	✓
R6	✓
R7	✓
R8	✓
R9	✓
R10	✓
R11	✓
R12	✓
R13	✓
R14	✓
R15	X
R16	✓
R17	✓
Mean score 4.29	
✓ = positive expectation	
X = negative expectation	

Source Author

Those who agreed that studying in city D or in the UK was safe mentioned that they had been told that the city was a university city, a retirement city, a family-friendly city and/or a low crime rate city. For example:

“City D is a small city, it is a university city. I read that the biggest employer is the University of D so it must be safe, and it is not a tourist city... I searched on Google and found that the crime rate was very low. It is what I expected from a university city so I’m happy with it” (R6, female, humanities student).

And:

“It is not a big industrial city or a big city like city H and I had a chat with Mr. C [Deputy Head of International Student Recruitment, University D, when he was in Thailand for the UK education fair in Bangkok; he told me that D is a quite safe city. It seemed like it is a retirement city or a university city...” (R8, female, business student).

And:

“I knew that there was one of the lowest crime rates cities in the country so it’s quite safe” (R17, male, business student).

Several students got safety information from their agencies in Thailand and friends who graduated from University D; both sources of information gave similar information, such as “you can be sure that your stuff will not be stolen” (R1, female, business student, from an agency in Bangkok), and “Safer than Bangkok... If you do not like a peaceful life, don’t come to D” (R14, female, business student, from a graduate student).

In contrast, one female student who believed that city D was not a safe place said:

“I thought I could not trust the city safety ranking on television or in the newspapers because if you go out at inappropriate times such as midnight or 1 am, I’m sure that nowhere is a safe place, so I thought everywhere you live is dangerous” (R15, female, psychology student).

It is notable that this student had had an experience of studying in the US when she was taking her bachelor’s degree which resulted in her forming an expectation based on her prior experience in the US.

Bringing together all the comments on safety, the sources of information that the students mentioned can be summarized as in the following table:

Table 5.10: Sources of Information Relating to Students’ Safety Expectations

Source of Information	Respondents
Agencies/ University representative	R1, R5, R8, R10, R11, R12
Graduate students, friends (Words of mouth)	R2, R3, R7, R9, R14, R17
Own opinion	R4, R13, R15, R16
Internet	R6, R10

Source: Author

As can be seen in Table 5.10, agencies/university representatives and word of mouth from friends and graduate students had the greatest influences on students' safety expectations. These information sources are also in line with major pieces of literature such as Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Mazzarol (1998), Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), Lawley and Blight (1997), Lawley and Perry (1998), Pimpa (2001, 2002a) and Yang (2007).

5.4.2 Expectations of Teaching Quality and Teaching Facilities

According to Krachenberg (1972), one of the most important roles of a university is teaching. International students pay for overseas education. Therefore, it is inevitable that teaching and teaching facilities would have tremendous importance for them (Kinnell, 1990). Douglas et al. (2006) also support the idea that since the core service of most universities is providing education for students, expectations are very much linked to the teaching ability and knowledge of the lecturers.

5.4.2.1 Expectations of Teaching Quality

This question was designed to discover what the expectations of the teaching quality of the lecturers in the university were. At the same time, the students were also required to rate their levels of expectation from 1 to 5, where one showed a minimal level of expectation and five was the maximum level. From the results, the mean expectation score for teaching quality was 4.35 (Table 5.11), indicating relatively highest expectations. Eight students gave the highest score of 5, seven students rated it at 4, and two students ended up with score of 3. The score of 4.35 also indicates that it was the second highest expectation area from the students' point of view. The findings of the studies carried out by Joseph and Joseph (1997) and Ford et al. (1999) were similar to those in our study. They found that academic issues, which included excellent instructors, were among the most important issues in relation to the service quality of universities.

Table 5.11: Expectations of Teaching Quality

Respondent	Relationship	Teaching Style	Lecturers' profile	Lecturer's Experience	Personality/ Dress
R1	✓			✓	✓
R2		✓		✓	
R3		✓			
R4		✓			
R5	X	✓	✓	✓	
R6	X	✓			
R7	✓	✓	✓		
R8		✓		✓	✓
R9		✓			
R10		✓		✓	
R11	✓	✓			
R12	✓	✓			
R13		✓			
R14	✓	✓			
R15	X	✓			
R16		✓			
R17		✓			
Mean score 4.35					
✓ = positive expectation					
X = negative expectation					

Source: Author

Table 5.11 summarizes a variety of expectations of teaching quality derived from the interviews. The outcomes indicate that relationship with lecturers, both positive and negative, were expected. In particular, students who expected a positive relationship explained that they expected to have a close relationship with their lecturers because some subjects have fewer students taking them than in Thailand. As a result, relationships should be closer than with lecturers in Thailand. Additionally, lecturers were expected to be contactable easily and quickly as a result of these closer relationships. Technology such as university email addresses and telephone numbers were mentioned as channels of communication between the two parties. For example:

“I expect to have better electronic communication than in Thailand because in Thailand we do not often use email to contact our lecturers. I think in the UK email responses from lecturers are much quicker” (R1, female, business student).

This quote shows that contact between students and their lecturers are not easy in Thailand. Emailing lecturers is not a popular channel of communication and the lecturers usually ignore the student emails. This experience may form students' expectation that lecturers overseas will be easy to contact in comparison to their lecturers in Thailand.

In contrast, some students expected negative relationships with lecturers. For example, R15 (female, psychology student) stated: "Lecturers will not pay attention to students, I believe" and R5 (female, business student) stated that "I don't think they have a close relationship with students because of the number of students in a class. So they can be contacted by email".

The second expectation regarding lecturers involved teaching styles and techniques. A variety of lecturer teaching styles were mentioned by the students. For example:

R3, female, business student: "Good explanations, easy to understand, kindness, reasonable marking".

R11, male, psychology student: "Lecturers are class leaders who foster brain storming, sharing ideas and correcting wrong answers".

R14, female, business student: "I hope the lecturers will teach us their own research or experience, rather than just take from books. I would like the lecturers to take us out to visit real business organizations as well".

R16, female, business student: "I hope the lecturers will teach the fundamentals of financial concepts in depth and explain how and why they have developed so far".

Furthermore, according to Hill (1995), postgraduate students may form their expectations in line with experiences at other institutions. In this case, the interview data reveal that the students formed their expectations in comparison with their prior experiences of Thai lecturers in previous universities. For example:

R8, female, business student: "I have quite high expectations; otherwise I would be better off studying in Thailand. Lecturers here should provide higher

international perspectives to students and clarify unclear points”.

R12, female, business student: “I hope to gain more knowledge than a textbook and hope the lecturers push us on thinking and getting ideas more than the lecturers in Thailand”.

R13, female, business student: “Lecturers should have a variety of experiences and open students’ perspective beyond studying in Thailand”.

R17, male, business student: “I heard that the lecturers use a discussion style of learning and that there is more interaction and openness to communication between lecturers and students than in Thailand”.

Lecturer profiles were another aspect of student expectations. Two students mentioned that they required lecturers who had obtained doctoral degrees. For example:

“It is somewhat good if a lecturer has a Ph.D. and has a high profile and experience”. (R5, female, business student)

And:

“I have some expectation that lecturers should be people who have obtained a title such as Professor or Dr.” (R7, female, business student).

Lecturer experience also featured in the expectations. One student stated that lecturers should have real experience of working in a business or a company rather than just of teaching in a university. Consequently, the lecturers were expected to pass on their experiences to students properly as their experiences might help the students to deal with similar situations in their careers.

Another expectation involved lecturer personalities. Although the majority of the students were not greatly concerned with lecturers’ personalities, R1 (female, business student) and R8 (female, business student) stated that they should dress smartly, have a good personality and appear professional. This may be because in

Thailand lecturers are regarded as having one of the most respectable careers and are therefore required to dress smartly.

Factors associated with learning and teaching, such as the teaching ability of staff and the subject expertise of lecturers, are regarded as comprising the most important area of university services in research by Douglas et al. (2006). This may be an important link with the expectations of teaching quality found among students in our interviews. Cubillo et al., (2006) confirm that perceptions of teaching staff reputations play an important role for graduate level students when they are selecting an institute.

5.4.2.2 Expectations of Teaching Support Facilities

Since the respondents had high expectations of their lecturers, the teaching support facilities provided by the university were also important as they facilitate the teaching ability of the lecturers, as well as the learning environment. The students were asked about their expectations of the quality of teaching support and were asked to rate their expectations using 5 scores.

Table 5.12: Expectations of Teaching Support Facilities

Respondent	Standard ordinary facility
R1	✓
R2	✓
R3	✓
R4	✓
R5	✓
R6	✓
R7	✓
R8	✓
R9	✓
R10	✓
R11	X
R12	✓
R13	✓
R14	✓
R15	✓
R16	✓
R17	✓
Mean Score 4.12	
✓ = positive expectation	
X = negative expectation	

Source: Author

In general, the students gave expectation scores ranging from 2 to 5, leading to an average score of 4.12, indicating high expectations (Table 5.12). The most frequent score was 4 (8 students), followed by 5 (6 students). Two students gave 3 and one student gave 2.

A summary of the expectation regarding teaching support facilities is shown in Table 5.12. As can be seen, the majority of students (16 students) expected to have adequate, clean classrooms with teaching support facilities such as microphones, PowerPoint devices, projectors and videos. Sample comments were:

“I would like to have a cleaned room, good microphones, speakers and PowerPoint devices” (R1, female, business student).

And:

“I expect a quite new classroom, which has a PowerPoint device and a quality sound system” (R9 female, business student).

This result is similar to those found in the research undertaken by Douglas et al. (2006). They found that it was not only services directly related to learning and teaching that were rated as the most important aspects of university services. Rather, factors associated with teaching and learning support, including supplementary lecture materials and blackboards, were also ranked as highly important by students.

In many cases, the students expected more high-technology teaching support facilities than in Thai universities. For example:

“I expect 5 because the university has a high student satisfaction ranking so I expect good facilities there and because it is an overseas university so it should have a higher quality of teaching support than in Thailand” (R7, female, business student).

In addition, an engineering student (R10, female) mentioned that engineering programs or software and high-technology laboratories should be provided for students, while many finance students expected to have financial demonstration programs for students to practice on, as well as websites and financial laboratories.

Furthermore, previous experience of teaching support facilities in other countries also influenced expectations. For instance, one female student (R15) had high expectations because she had previous experience of studying in America and she assumed that UK universities would have the same quality of teaching support facilities.

However, one male student had low expectations of the quality of teaching support. This may be due to students like him spending more time in the library researching than in the classroom, leading to teaching support being overlooked. This was his comment:

“I expect just an ordinary classroom with general facilities such as a projector. I don’t expect teaching support much because I believe students

spend time in a library rather than in a classroom” (R11, male, psychology student).

In summary, the high expectation score for the quality of teaching support facilities may result from the university’s ranking performance. In other words, the students deduced that if a university is in highly ranked, its teaching support facilities should be of an acceptable standard. This is added to the fact that the UK is regarded as one of the most developed countries in the world and one of the leading education exporters for international students. The British Council promotes a world-class brand for British education (British Council, 1999 and Sidhu, 2002). Therefore, the expectation is that its educational quality, including educational support facilities, should be greater than in other countries.

Furthermore, a positive previous experience of teaching support another country also created a high expectation.

5.4.3 Expectations of Support Staff

Beyond physical facilities and teaching quality, Douglas et al. (2006) indicate most universities have to provide their students with implicit services from non-academic staff. They suggest that these services include friendliness and approachability, a willingness to help if students have problems, respect for feelings and opinions etc.

Concerning support staff at University D, the students had both negative and positive expectations. The mean score of 3.82 represents a high expectation but this was lower than that for quality of teaching and teaching support facilities, which obtained scores of 4.35 and 4.12 respectively (Table 5.6).

The interview data summarized in Table 5.13 show that students’ expectations of support staff can be grouped into two main categories: the quality of service and being service-oriented, and knowledge of the work and good support systems. The first of these was the most frequently mentioned by the students.

Table 5.13: Expectations of Supporting Staff

Respondent	Quality of service and service-oriented	Knowledge of their work and good support systems
R1	X	
R2	✓	
R3		✓
R4	X	
R5	✓	
R6	✓	
R7	✓	
R8	✓	✓
R9	✓	
R10	✓	✓
R11	✓	
R12	✓	
R13	X	
R14	X	
R15	X	
R16	X	
R17		✓
Mean score 3.82		
✓ = positive expectation		
X = negative expectation		

Source: Author

Both positive and negative comments were made about quality of service and service orientation. On the positive side, nine students expected the staff to be willing to help and patient with enquiries. Sample opinions of students are:

“I hope they will give good service to international students because we have a problem with English. I hope they give good instructions to us, for example at the beginning of the semester we might do something wrong or forget to register and that may cause us to miss a chance to study; they are here to help” (R5, male, business student).

And:

“As an international student, I expect helpful suggestions, friendliness, enthusiasm and a sufficient number of staff” (R2, female, business student).

Additionally, one female student gave an interesting opinion:

“... The staff should be prepared and ready to connect with international students and they should have experience of dealing with international students. This is because the university has been opened to international students for ages. Its ranking is as one of the top 10 universities and there are thousands of international students studying there. Thus, the support staff should have full experience of dealing with a variety of problems and they should be patient.” (R6, female, humanities student)

Specifically, it was found that some students had relatively high expectations which were formed by fast responses and helpful information from admissions staff during the application process.

“I rated my expectation 4 out of 5 because they gave me a fast response when I made contact before I came” (R8, female, business student).

And:

“... when I contacted the international office, they gave me fast and helpful information” (R11, male, psychology student).

On the other hand, six students had negative expectations. It was found that these were caused by unimpressive experiences when contacting university support staff during the application process. For example:

“Before I came I did have not much of an expectation because I contacted the administrative staff of the international office and I did not get good assistance and help from them” (R16, female, business student).

Additionally, some indicated that they had negative expectations of support staff because of the following personal views: lower staff than student numbers, and negative perceptions of service towards foreigners. Furthermore, negative expectations also resulted from negative experiences in previous universities in Thailand. For instance:

“I had a bad experience of service staff at my university in Thailand and it has made me not expect much of staff service at this university” (R14, female, business student).

The second perception was referred to knowledge of their work and good support systems. R10 commented on knowledge of work that:

“Although they are not lecturers, they should have the ability to answer my questions and have knowledge of their job. For example, when I go to the laboratory and I ask them how to use laboratory instruments, they should have the ability to give me helpful instructions” (R10, female, engineering student).

Effective support systems were commented on by two students. They hoped to have an effective/powerful support system that helped staff carry out effective and high-quality work. One comment was:

“I hope there are effective systems to support service quality and professional staff to facilitate what students want” (R17, male, business student)

These quotations regarding support staff reflect the fact that in the international market support staff service gives the first impression of the university. If students are dissatisfied with this at the beginning, it will reduce students' satisfaction with other educational services provided by the university. It therefore seems important that universities should train their staff to get used to international students' requirements and behaviours; for example, how to respond to students' problems and language. This will help survival in the crucial markets of the university. Douglas et al. (2006) add that all university employees, no matter whether they are academic staff, administrative staff or non-contact staff in management roles, should be notified that they are responsible for delivering high-quality services to students. Therefore, their performances have a direct impact on student satisfaction.

5.4.4 Expectations of Libraries and Computing and IT Systems

Library and computing services, as well as IT facilities, are regarded as physical facilities of the university. These topics are used as general indicators of student satisfaction in higher education institutes by many authors (e.g. Harvey and Busher, 1996; Hill, 1995; Aldridge and Rowley, 1998; Arambewela and Hall, 2001; Arambewela, 2003; Arambewela et al., 2005; Gruber et al., 2010 and Munteanu et al., 2010).

5.4.4.1 Expectations of Libraries

The quality of library facilities is a major influence of students' university choices (Price et al., 2003). Douglas et al. (2006) support that perceptions of university facilities have an impact on decisions to enroll in particular institutions.

Initially, the students were asked about their expectations of the university library. Sixteen out of the seventeen students had relatively high to highest expectations,

Table 5.14: Expectations of Libraries

Res.	Books and materials	Electronic Journals	High-tech searching system	Opening Hours	Size	Borrowing and returning system	Better than in Thailand	Discussion rooms and study zones	Quiet
R1	✓	✓	✓	✓					
R2	✓				✓				
R3	✓	✓	✓			✓			
R4	✓		✓	✓					
R5	✓								
R6	X				X				
R7	✓		✓		✓				
R8		✓	✓				✓		
R9	✓	✓							
R10	✓								
R11	✓	✓						✓	
R12	✓		✓					✓	
R13	✓			✓		✓	✓		
R14	✓					✓			✓
R15	✓	✓						✓	
R16	✓					✓			
R17	✓	✓		✓				✓	
Mean Score 4.41									
✓ = positive expectation X = negative expectation									

Source: Author

with scores ranging from 4-5 (seven students rated it at 4, and nine students rated it at 5). The mean score of 4.41 indicates relatively highest expectations of the library and was the highest score in this phase.

In general, almost all the students had positive expectations of the library and their expectations were similar. These expectations, shown in Table 5.14, included sufficient books (16 students), electronic journals and resources (7 students), a high-tech searching system (6 students), 24-hour opening (4 students), an efficient borrowing and return system (4 students), discussion rooms and study zones (4 students), big size (3 students), better than Thai university libraries (2 students) and being quiet (1 student).

The results reveal that their library expectations may be formed from previous experiences. Students who had experienced studying in the US expected an equal standard of library facilities in the UK. For example:

“I think my expectation relates to my previous experience of studying in America. It was really good. It was 4-5-storey building which had enormous numbers of books and had different study zones, e.g. silent zones, group discussion zones and private group discussion rooms (20-30 rooms). It also provided internet accesses to electronic resources such as Bloomberg and e-journals from home” (R15, female, psychology student).

It could be that these students pay more attention to the library because the library is an important facility for master's degree students, given that they are likely to focus on research as well as lecture. A sample comment was that a “library is important for post-grad students because we don't just study in the lecture room but also do research in the library as well” (R1, female, business student). and “...the library is the most important facility compared to other facilities because when we want to research we have to go to the library as studying in the UK seems to have a self-study focus” (R9, female, business student). Furthermore, variations in library-related expectations resulted from university ranking:

“I’ll give the library 5 because the university has a good ranking so it should offer a good standardised library” (R4, female, business student).

Only one student expressed a negative library expectation. In her view, this was formed by the information she got from the website. This is her comment:

“I saw on the internet that the library is very small and is under construction, so I think that I might have to buy some books for myself” (R6, female, humanities student).

5.4.4.2 Expectations of Computing and IT Systems

Students’ expectations of computers and IT support were also investigated in the research. According to Arambewela and Hall (2008: 133), the use of computers is important to students because “Some subjects require computer applications and analysis, and the presence of modern and adequate computer facilities enhances the attractiveness of universities among students”.

Table 5.15 summarizes students’ expectations in relation to computer and IT systems. In general, the total score of 4 suggests that expectations of computer and IT support were high. For computing facilities, half the students expressed positive expectations but the other half expressed no preferences of computing facilities. The first group, which had medium to high expectations, agreed that computer facilities should be sufficient for the numbers of students and that there should be easily accessible PC clusters throughout the campus (6 students), updated technology (4 students), support staff available (1 students) and printers (1 students). For example:

Table 5.15: Expectations of Computing and IT

Res.	Computers					IT				
	Up-to-date	Staff assistance	Sufficient and easy access	Printers	No preference	Up-to-date	Free software	Fast	Wi-Fi	Staff assistance
R1					○	✓				✓
R2					○					
R3	✓	✓	✓							
R4	✓		✓	✓						
R5					○					
R6					○					
R7			✓				✓			
R8					○			✓	✓	
R9					○		✓			
R10					○					
R11	✓								✓	
R12						✓				
R13										
R14			✓							
R15			✓							
R16	✓		✓			X				
R17									✓	✓
Mean score 4										
✓ = positive expectation										
X = negative expectation										
○ = no preference										

Source: Author

“I think the computers will be new, and have spare accessories when they are out of order or there will be someone to fix them. Computers should be sufficient in numbers for students’ demand” (R3, female, business student).

“I hope computers will be sufficient and available in many open-access PC clusters throughout the campus” (R7, female, business student).

And:

“For computers should be 4 as in the website it is said that there is a big laboratory in each faculty. Computers should be enough for students” (R16, female, business student)

These comments reveal that computers were expected to be important for study purposes. Arambewela and Hall (2008) support the idea that modern computer equipment and adequate numbers of computers that are made available when required are expected by international students. These high expectations about computing facilities come from the fact that universities promise them in their promotional material or because students are told about them by educational agencies or consultants (Arambewela and Hall, 2008).

On the other hand, some students had no preferences because they had their own laptops and preferred to use them rather than university's computers:

"I do not expect computers because I have my own laptop in my accommodation which I can use at 12 am or 1 pm" (R6, female, humanities student).

Interestingly, although several students had no computing preferences, they gave the highest score to computers. This may result from the fact that they expected the computing facilities of the university to be of a high standard but even though they assumed they would not use them.

Concerning IT systems, the students rated their expectations from 3 to 5. Their expectations included up-to-date IT and software (3 students), free software for students (such as financial software) (2 students), fast internet connections (1 student), Wi-Fi internet access in every teaching building (3 students) and IT staff availability for students (2 students). When asked why they have these expectations, the students compared the UK with previous universities in Thailand and were sure that IT and software facilities in UK universities would be superior to those at home. However, whilst many students indicated medium to high positive expectations of IT, one female student had negative expectations as she said that she did not pay attention to IT and she thought the systems might be too old.

5.4.5 Expectations of Accommodation

Accommodation is another important consideration for overseas students as it is their home for a whole year of studying overseas. The UKCOSA study (Merrick, 2004) indicates that accommodation is highest on the list of students' concerns before arrival. It is also one of the factors that indicates service quality in higher education institutes in several surveys with international students carried out by Arambewela (2003), Joseph and Joseph (1997), Ford et al. (1999), Khozaei et al. (2011) and Paltridge et al. (2010).

At the time of the interviews, most of the interviewees had just arrived from Thailand and fifteen of them were living in the university's self-catering accommodation, which has either a studio room or an en-suite room. Two students were excluded from this category because they lived in private accommodation. Overall, the students had positive expectations about the quality of accommodation that can be categorized into 4 factors: rooms and facilities, cleanliness, safety and location, as summarized in Table 5.16. The mean expectation score for

Table 5.16: Expectations of Accommodation

Respondent	Rooms and facilities	Cleanliness	Safety	Location
R1	✓	✓	✓	
R2	✓		✓	✓
R3	✓		✓	✓
R4	✓		✓	✓
R5	✓			
R6	✓		✓	✓
R7		✓		
R8	✓	✓	✓	
R9	✓	✓		✓
R10	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
R11	✓			✓
R12	✓			
R13	✓			
R14	✓		✓	✓
R15	✓			
R16	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
R17	✓		✓	✓
Mean score 4				

Source: Author

accommodation was 4, indicating high expectations, with the highest expectation score being 5 and the lowest 3.

Rooms and facilities were the most frequently mentioned aspects (14 students). The expectations included a big room and ready-to-use facilities including the internet, a kitchenette, a free washing machine and comfortable furniture. Moreover, the data confirm that some female students paid more attention to hygiene:

“My friend told me that it is not far from the city centre and we should choose accommodation with its own bathroom but sharing a kitchen is fine for me” (R14, female, business student).

The output of the interviews shows that students may form expectations as a result of information from university websites. Previous experience again played an important role in accommodation expectations. Some students had low expectations because they compared their accommodation to that in the US, where rooms and facilities were excellent. University ranking also influenced students' expectations of accommodation. This was because people believed that UK universities had to provide acceptable standards of accommodation to students in order to maintain their ranking positions.

The cleanliness of the accommodation was mentioned by four female students, some of whom said that cleanliness was expected because the accommodation was brand new.

Safety was another student expectation about accommodation. Some comments on safety were: “I’m not concerned about how good the accommodation is but I’m quite concerned about the safety and convenience of the accommodation” (R14, female, business student); and “I think university accommodation is the safest accommodation” (R8, female, business student). Another female respondent commented that the safety of the accommodation was a concern because she a woman who had just come from overseas (R4, business student).

The final expectation referred to the location of the accommodation. This outcome highlights the fact that accommodation should be conveniently located (eight students). One female student commented that “The accommodation [name of her accommodation] is close to the main train station, which is very convenient for travelling by train...” (R14, female, business student).

Although accommodation fees are usually considered one of the factors international students are concerned about when selecting somewhere to live (Mori, 2006; Arambewela and Hall, 2008), the results of this study did not find that students paid attention to accommodation prices in the expectation phase. Factors such as cleanliness, hygiene, full facilities and being close to the university were more important to the students than the price of the rent. This may be because master’s degree students only study for 9 month to a year, so accommodation costs are less of an issue.

5.4.6 Expectations of Social Life

As well as students’ expectations about how they will study in the university and how they will stay in the UK, the social life also influences international students’ expectations. Kinnell (1989) and Lacina (2002) claim that difficulties sometimes arise for international students living abroad: they may be lonely or and feel that they are alienated from their surroundings. Many researchers suggest that extracurricular activities, out-of-class activities and social support can help them to overcome these problems and adjust themselves to campus life abroad (Lewin, 1990; Toyokawa and Toyokawa, 2002; Lacina, 2002; Yeh and Inose, 2003).

This section presents students’ expectations in relation to non-academic factors in terms of the variety of social activities and friends.

5.4.6.1 Expectations of Social Activities and Clubs

Concerning expectations about the variety of the social life, such as activities and clubs, students gave scores from 1 to 5, giving a mean score of 3. This represents a medium level of expectation and the lowest expectation score within the sub-topic of six categories (see Table 5.6). Table 5.17 summarizes the expectations around social activities and clubs.

Table 5.17: Expectations of Social Activities and Clubs

Respondent	Activities provided	Not joined
R1	✓	✓
R2	✓	✓
R3	X	✓
R4	X	✓
R5	X	✓
R6	✓	✓
R7	X	✓
R8	✓	✓
R9	✓	✓
R10	X	✓
R11	X	
R12	✓	✓
R13	✓	
R14	✓	✓
R15	✓	✓
R16	✓	✓
R17	✓	✓
Mean score 3		
✓ = positive expectation		
X = negative expectation		

Source: Author

Of the seventeen students, eleven of them expressed expectations that there would be activities provided by the university. Six students, on the other hand, stated the opposite. However, fifteen students, across both groups, revealed that they did not intend to join in with activities and clubs while studying. The interview outcomes revealed that the students were hesitant about joining these activities because they thought they would have to study hard due to the fact that their courses were only nine months long. Examples of comments are:

R16, female, business student: “I think there are many activities but I don’t think we can join. I don’t think we have time to participate in the activities as the curriculum is very intensive because one year has 180 credits”.

R8, female, business student: “I think the university has many activities for students but I’m not sure I’ll be able to join because my friend told me that there is not much time as a result of studying hard”.

R12, female, business student: “I looked at the course structure before I came; it was tight. I had a chat with a student who graduated from University D last year and was told that the schedule was tight so I don’t expect activities. I know that the university supports a good sport activity. I have no idea of being able to join and look forward to seeing what’s going on”.

R15, female, psychology student: “I expect many activities. I think there are activities provided but the point is I might not be able to join. Activities available in the university may be tennis, badminton etc”.

These results indicate that although universities provide this service for their students, it might not be considered an important factor. As postgraduate students, they knew that their study load, group work, assignments and research would consume most of their time at university.

5.4.6.2 Expectations of Friends

This current study also investigates respondents’ expectations about having UK friends as well as international ones. The interview results, shown in Table 5.18, reveal that sixteen out of the seventeen students agreed that they expected to have friendships with both international and British students. This had a mean score of 3.77, representing a high level of expectation.

Table 5.18: Expectations of Friends

Respondents	International Friends	British Friends	Thai Friends
R1	✓		
R2	✓	✓	
R3	✓	✓	
R4	✓		
R5	✓	✓	
R6	✓	✓	
R7		✓	
R8	✓	✓	
R9	✓	✓	
R10	✓		
R11	✓		
R12	✓		
R13			✓
R14	✓		
R15	✓		
R16	✓	✓	
R17	✓		
Mean score 3.77			

Source: Author

Sixteen students commented that they were quite certain that they would have chances to meet international and/or British students and become friends. One student mentioned that having international and/or British friends was one of her goals in studying overseas. Another interesting comment from one female student was:

“Coming here should mean having more overseas friends, especially British, otherwise it would be better to study in Thailand.” (R3, female, business student)

This quotation suggests that having friends from other countries is a positive intention in studying here. This result is in line with Kinnell (1990) and Smith and Khawaja (2011) in that they reported that international students expected to socialize with host students when studying overseas. Merrick (2004) also found that mixing with British students was one of the top concerns of international students before their arrival in the UK.

The outcomes highlight that the students felt making new friends would not be difficult because there would be many channels for meeting people. These included classmates, people living in the same accommodation or the same flat, and friends of friends. Friends were also seen as giving students some benefits. The respondents recounted that having friends would help their English improve as well as improving their cultural learning:

“I expect a little bit high because I hope friends will help me practice English and I can learn their culture” (R8, female, business student).

However, as can be seen from Table 5.18, the majority of students expected to have international friends such as friends from Asian countries rather than British ones. One student commented that “I think I will have more Asian friends than British friends because there are not many local students studying in the school for master’s degrees” (R3, female, business student). This reflects the high proportion of Asian students at the post-graduate level, which leads to more opportunities to meet and work in groups with Asian rather than local students. No differences were seen in the friend expectations of business studies students and students of other subjects as both groups supposed they would have international rather than British friends. Furthermore, the interview data indicate that some students had negative perceptions of British students, such as:

“For me personally, I think I will have Asian friends rather than British friends. This is because British students do not pay attention to us. I feel like they are in their own society” (R15, female, psychology student).

Russell (2005) and Montgomery (2010) found that international students have stereotypical views of British students as reserved, cold, uncaring, unfriendly and closed to different cultures. Montgomery (2010) indicates that these prejudgments from international students may be a clear barrier to relationships between them and British students. This may also be the case with Thai students.

Whilst sixteen students expressed expectations that they would have international and/or British friends, one female student stated the opposite. She preferred to socialize with friends from Thailand. Here is her comment:

“I have no expectations at all of having international friends here. I know that there are many Chinese students here; around 90 percent of students are Chinese and 10 percent are British. I think I prefer joining up with Thai friends rather than international friends because with Thai friends we can meet up in Thailand when we go back”.

From this quotation, it can be seen that this student focuses on long-term relationships and networking after graduation, which excludes international and British friends as they would not be able to maintain long-term relationships.

5.5 Conclusion

There has been a lack of past research into factors influencing students' decision making and of longitudinal studies into service quality in higher education. Therefore, this chapter has aimed to identify the importance of factors influencing decisions and to understand what students expect to receive from their universities. This is the first phase of the qualitative research and the results will be compared and contrasted with the perception phase (Phase 2) in the following chapter.

The outcomes revealed that the decision to study in the UK arose mainly from the duration of master's degree courses which, at 9 months, are shorter than in other education exporting countries. This means that students can save time and financial resources. These findings may be in contrast with some previous research. In terms of choosing a university, the results indicate that internal factors including university ranking, fast responses from the admissions office and not having to undertake a dissertation are major consideration factors. External factors, such as word of mouth, city characteristics, refusals from other universities and

scholarship conditions, also have significant impacts on university selection. It also found that benefits from overseas degree after students return to their home country after graduation, e.g. having better career opportunities, overseas experiences, knowledge and family pride, have significantly influenced students to undertake education abroad.

Expectations of university service quality were examined across 6 areas: location, teaching quality and facilities, support staff, libraries and computing and IT, accommodation and social life. The students had the highest expectation scores in relation to library (4.41). This may be because students think they are going to spend most of their time researching for papers and assignments in the library rather than in the classroom. The lowest expectation score related to on-campus social life (3), such as activities and clubs. This result indicates that, in spite of there being many activities provided for students by the university, these do not matter to these students as they feel they will not have time to join in with them.

It was clear that, in many cases, students' expectations had formed from their previous experiences at other universities (Hill, 1995). For example, many students had high expectations of their lecturers, computing and IT because they compared them with previous experiences in Thailand and other countries. Furthermore, university ranking also has an important impact on students' expectations of lecturer quality and teaching support facilities. In addition, the results indicate that there is a positive relationship between the information gained from a university's website and the degree of students' expectations. In other words, the more information the students obtained, the more expectations they formed.

The results relating to the students' perceptions will be presented in the next chapter.

Chapter Six

Experiences of Students

6.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the interview results related to expectations were discussed. This chapter presents the second phase of the qualitative study, looking at 17 students' perceptions of their experiences of a provincial UK university. These students were interviewed twice. The key aim of this chapter is to research objective 5 of this study: To investigate the expectation - experience gap that current Thai students experience in relation to UK higher education. In particular, this chapter outlines their experiences and the factors that influence their experiences and the gap between them.

As mentioned in the methodology chapter (Chapter 3) and the analysis of expectations chapter (Chapter 5), the majority of research into expectations-experiences in higher education is cross-sectional in nature. For example, data are collected when students are already at university and they are asked to rate their expectations and perceived experiences in one questionnaire at the same time (e.g. Joseph and Joseph, 1997; Mai, 2005; Arambewela, 2003; Arambewela and Hall, 2006; Ford et al., 1999; Douglas et al., 2006). The limitation of this is that students may not correctly recall the expectations they had before they entered their university, and this may result in biased results. Hence, this study has been designed to overcome this limitation by utilizing a longitudinal research design, following Rowley's suggestion about "the need for higher education institutions to gather information on students' expectations not only during their time at university but also at the point of arrival and, if possible, beforehand so that it is possible to track the development of expectations" (Rowley, 1997: 11). Institute for Social and Economic Research (2012:1) states that "A longitudinal study provides data about the same individual at different points in time allowing the researcher to track change at the individual level". Therefore, the students from the first phase of this

study were interviewed twice (before university and at university). One benefit arising from this being a longitudinal study was that students were more relaxed and more open about discussing their university experiences in the second interview as they had formed a closer relationship with the interviewer. Additionally, trust between the researcher and students had also been created. A limitation of the longitudinal study, in contrast, was that the researcher had to maintain contact and relationships with the students. This was to ensure that all the respondents in the first interview would also be included in the second interview.

The first student interviews were carried out in September-October 2010, before the students began university. The second interview was to be undertaken in June-July 2011, after the students had finished their examinations. This was because before this time the students were too busy with assignments and preparing for their final examinations to undertake interviews. All the respondents in this phase were the same people who were interviewed in the first phase.

This chapter starts by outlining the structure of the interviews, which were divided into six categories of perceptions of university service quality. After that, the research will move on to discussing the interview results. The perception scores for each category and sub-category are also reported in this section. Finally, the expectation and perceived experience scores are compared in order to discuss the service quality gap.

6.2 Interview Structure

Unlike the first phase interviews, the second phase interviews do not focus on the demographics and decision making students because these have already been presented in sections 5.2 and 5.3 of the previous chapter. The questions in this part follow those concerning the expectations of students (the first phase interviews). This is because in this phase students had experiences that they could compare with their previous expectations. That is, they were asked to explain their experiences and to rate their perception scores according to their views. The five-

point scale ranges from 1, which is the lowest score, to 5, which is the highest score. A high score represents a positive experience, whereas a low score represents a more negative experience. The gap score is used to investigate the discrepancies between the expectations and experiences of students (P-E). The questions are divided into 6 categories: university location, quality of teaching and teaching facilities, support staff, university library and computing and IT services, accommodation, and social life (see the interview schedule in Appendix 6).

6.3 Students' Experience Perceptions

The results of the experience phase are summarised in Table 6.1. This score is based on a five-point Likert scale where 1 represents the minimum perceived experience score and 5 is the maximum score. As can be seen from Table 6.1, the overall average perception score was 3.52 in 6 categories, indicating relatively good perceptions among students. The highest perception score was for the safety issue (4.41), followed by staff services (4.12) and geographical location and convenience of travel, which achieved the same score (3.88). Conversely, students were most disappointed with the library, quality of teaching and teaching support facilities (2.41, 3.12 and 3.18 respectively).

Table 6.1: Perception Scores in 6 Categories

Category	Topic	Expectation Score
1. Location	Geographic location	3.88
	Convenient travel	3.88
	Safety	4.41
2. Quality of Teaching and Teaching Facilities	Quality of Teaching	3.12
	Teaching Support Facilities	3.18
3. Support Staff	Staff Services	4.12
4. Library, Computing and IT	Library	2.41
	Computing and IT	3.29
5. Accommodation	Accommodation	3.82
6. Social Life	Social activities and Clubs	3.41
	Friends	3.24
Overall Mean Score		3.52

Source: Author

6.3.1 Perceived Experiences of Location

6.3.1.1 Perceived Experiences Related to Geographical Location

Table 6.1 shows a relatively good perceived experience of geographical location (3.88). In the previous chapter, the expectation score for geographical location was 3.35. The fact that the students' experiences exceed their expectations will lead to student satisfaction, according to the customer satisfaction literature (Cronin and Taylor, 1992). A summary of the students' comments is presented in Table 6.2. As can be seen, the majority of students (11) mentioned their satisfaction with the climate, which is warmer than in other parts of the UK, as the following quote illustrates:

“It is great to live in city D because my friends told me that it was extremely freezing in Scotland. I think D's climate is ok for me. Unfortunately, there was snow at Christmas; luckily, only two weeks of the snow. When

compared to other locations where my friends live, living in the south west is best for a person who hates cold weather like me” (R6, female, humanities student).

Another student commented as follows:

“The climate in city D is much better than in the north of the country. It is warmer. I like it” (R2, female, business student).

It was found in the expectation phase that the students expected the climate in city D to be warmer than in other parts of UK. Their comments in this phase proved that they were happy with the climate they were living in. It is quite clear that climate plays an important role for students in selecting their choice of place to live and study in. Students from Thailand, which has a hot climate, prefer a warmer climate while studying abroad. This result supports the study by Danglish and Chan (2005) showing that one important factor in international students choosing Brisbane, Australia as a study destination was the warm climate. In particular, students who came from warm climate countries are likely to choose a location with a similar climate to their home country.

Table 6.2: Perceptions of Experiences Related to Geographic Location

Respondents	Climate	Activities available	City location	No Preference
R1				○
R2	✓			
R3		✓		
R4	✓	✓		
R5	✓	✓		
R6	✓			
R7	✓	✓		
R8	✓		✓	
R9			✓	
R10	✓			
R11				○
R12	✓			
R13			✓	
R14	✓			
R15	✓			
R16			✓	
R17	✓			
Mean score 3.88				
✓ = positive expectation				
○ = no preference				

Source: Author

Some students (4) commented on the activities available. One of the female students said:

“City D is surrounded by the sea and it has many attractive places which are not far from the city so I can choose many activities to do. It is not too far to go to other nearby cities by train...” (R7, female, business student).

The city’s location was another consideration agreed on by 4 students. It was claimed that the city was beautiful, with lovely people and a reasonable cost of living. Furthermore, a female student commented that:

“Its city location, with the university located on the hillside of the edge of city, offers a beautiful green view which is what I really like and is more than I expected” (R16, female, business student).

These above comments are in line with Mori (2001, 2002), who identifies that location and social activities in a town/city are important factors related to environmental conditions which influence the choice of university. Mori (2002) confirms that the social activities offered in a town or cities are more important to younger students, particularly those aged 22 and under. Although the majority of our respondents were aged 20-29, Mori's (2002) findings can also be applied to them.

However, two students pointed out that geographical location, climate or city location did not influence their perceptions of their university experience. This is perhaps because they paid more attention to studying and overlooked factors related to the location of the university. One of them confirmed that these aspects were not important for him.

6.3.1.2 Perceptions of Experiences of Convenience of Travel

In the experience stage it was found that the students had positive experiences of the convenience of travel (3.88). When comparing this with the previous expectation score of 3.53, a positive gap score is seen to occur. In other words, the students showed satisfaction with this topic. The students' comments are summarised in Table 6.3 and categorized based on travelling to London and travelling within city D.

Table 6.3: Perceptions of Experiences of Travel Convenience

Respondents	Travelling to/from London		Travelling to university
	Convenience of travel	Travel costs	Convenience of travel
R1	✓		✓
R2	✓		✓
R3	✓	X	✓
R4	X		✓
R5	✓		✓
R6	✓	X	✓
R7	✓		✓
R8	X	X	✓
R9	X		✓
R10	✓		✓
R11	X		✓
R12	✓		✓
R13	X		✓
R14	✓		✓
R15	✓		✓
R16	✓	X	✓
R17	✓		✓
Mean score 3.88			
✓ = positive experience			
X = negative experience			

Source: Author

The interview results confirm that twelve students out of the seventeen agreed travelling to/from London or the university is perceived as convenient. Many comments indicated that the students preferred to travel to London by train and found it very easy, taking approximately two and a half hours, only. In addition, the students commented on their well-located accommodation near the main railway station. The students in this group rated convenience of travel between four and five.

On the other hand, five students did not perceive travel to London as convenient. One said that "...it is not very convenient in terms of travel to London or going to Heathrow Airport because there are limited travel options and many changes to reach the airport..." (R13, female, business student). It is significant that fifteen out of the seventeen students were from Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand. Travelling from Bangkok to other domestic destinations and international

destinations is very convenient for them compared to travelling from city D. This factor may influence their perceived travel experiences. One student commented on the time needed to travel, explaining that, for her, the only option was the train as it was faster.

Four students raised the issue of travel costs. An example quotation from a female student from Humanities was:

“London has many attractive places for me to see. Sadly, train tickets are quite expensive so I have not been able to go to London as often as I wanted” (R6, female, humanities student).

Considering the experience of travelling in city D, the results indicated that all the students were happy with their travel, especially in terms of going from their accommodation to the university. 15 out of the 17 students lived in the university accommodation on campus, and the walking duration of 10-15 minutes was convenient for business studies students, while it took only 5 minutes for humanities students. Illustrative examples are:

“It is very good, very close... even closer than I expected. To my school is only 10 minutes... if I forget something, it is very convenient to come back and get it” (R4, female, business student).

And:

“...three minutes to my faculty; the teaching building is right next to my accommodation” (R11, male, psychology student).

6.3.1.3 Perceptions of Safety Experiences

According to Arambewela and Hall (2009), safety is one of the major concerns of international students and their families when making a decision to undertake education in a foreign country. Arambewela and Hall's (2009) research was with international postgraduate students in Australia, which is similar to this study. However, Arambewela and Hall (2009)'s data derived from a mail survey which

was adapted from the SURVQUAL model developed by Parasuraman et al. (1985). Australia appears to have a reputation for safety (Arambewela, 2009; Lawley and Perry, 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002). The US, on the other hand, is regarded as a less safe place to study due to terrorism and discrimination (Altbach, 2004), especially since September 11 (Chen and Zimitat, 2006). Additionally, a previous study by Lee and Rice (2007) on students' experiences in the US confirms that non-white students (such as Middle Eastern, Asian, Indian and Latin American students) report having experienced discomfort, verbal and direct confrontations, while white English-speaking students (Europeans, New Zealanders and Canadians) rarely report having such experiences.

In our research, safety was important issue in the expectation phase, with a high score of 4.29. However, in the experience phase, the mean score for experiences of safety was 4.41 (Table 6.1), indicating the students were more impressed with their experiences of safety. This was also the highest score across all topics.

The data confirmed that all seventeen students had positive perceptions of safety in city D, with the majority saying that they had never had bad experiences while there. Example quotations are:

“...the safety here is higher than I expected. I can carry a large amount of money anywhere in city D without worrying...” (R14, female, business student).

And:

“I have never met any strangeness. I sometimes go back to my accommodation in the dark but it is still safe. I've been told that the crime rate here is at a minimum and it is... I have never heard of anyone not being safe” (R5, male, business student).

The comments above support the finding that worries about theft and discrimination have not been experienced by the students. All of them were satisfied with their safety experience, in spite of there being one student who did not express an expectation of safety in the first interview. The students may be

satisfied with their safety experiences because city D is a university city which is full of both British students and international students from all over the world. In addition, the proportion of elderly people in city D is high. These factors may form a more peaceful local community and environment. Last but not least, the UK in general is perhaps more law abiding than in many countries. These factors may form positive confidence in safety for students and their families while studying in city D and may possibly be generalisable to the whole of the UK. This result is consistent with British Council (2012) in that UK is perceived by international standards as a safe country. A recent survey 'International student safety survey 2010' by British Council also confirms that the vast majority of students responded that the UK is a very safe place to study, with only a very small proportion of students had experienced violence and street crime (British Council, 2012)

6.3.2 Perceptions of Experiences of the Quality of Teaching and Teaching Support Facilities

Since the major role of a university is to provide knowledge and skills for its students (Joseph and Joseph, 1997), factors related to teaching such as the quality of lecturers, teaching facilities, learning environments and lecture materials are used in many studies of student satisfaction and university service provision (e.g. Ford et al., 1999; Arambewela and Hall, 2001; Arambewela, 2003; Arambewela et al., 2005; Mai, 2005; Douglas et al., 2006; Gruber et al., 2010). Currently, the intense competition among universities across many countries is pushing universities to show their knowledge of and expertise in academic standards (Munteanu et al., 2010). The quality of lecturers and teaching support is usually used as a university performance indicator differentiates university positions in the market (Joseph and Joseph, 1997).

6.3.2.1 Perceptions of Quality of Teaching Experiences

Although many studies have found that the performances of lecturers or the quality of teaching are seen as highly satisfactory by students (Ford et al., 1999; Ward and

Masgoret, 2004; Mai, 2005; Mori, 2006; Douglas et al., 2006), this work may challenge some of these results.

In the expectation phase, teaching quality gained the second highest score (4.35) after library facilities. The results from the experience phase show a score of 3.12 for the quality of teaching (Table 6.4), indicating a neutral perception because the score is close to 3.

The comments from students in regard to their lecturers and teaching quality can be classified into nine areas: teaching, contacts, teaching content, academic knowledge, experience of teaching, accent, marking and feedback, tutorial classes and supervision as shown in Table 6.4.

Table 6.4: Perceptions of Quality of Teaching Experiences

Respondents	Contact	Teaching		Content	Marking & feedback	Experience	knowledge	Accent	tutorial	Dissertation supervision
		Teaching style	Self-study							
R1	✓	✓								
R2		X								
R3		X		X	X	X				
R4		✓					✓	X		
R5							X		X	
R6		X	X	X	X	X				
R7	✓	✓		X				X	X	
R8	✓	X						X		
R9						X	X		X	
R10			X			X				
R11			X		X					
R12		X	X	X	X					
R13		X	X				X			
R14							✓	X		
R15							X			✓
R16		X		X		X	✓	X	X	X
R17	✓		X				✓	X		
Mean score 3.12										
✓ = positive experience										
X = negative experience										

Source: Author

For teaching, the students commented on teaching style and self-study. The most frequent area commented on was teaching style (10 students), with both negative and positive comments. On the positive side, three students considered that their lecturers were very good as they offered effective explanations and were very supportive of students. Unfortunately, these lecturers were limited in number; the students said that there were only one or two good lecturers on their courses. On the other hand, seven students gave negative opinions; most of these expressed dissatisfaction with their lecturers. They commented on topics such as few opportunities for student participation in the classrooms and insufficient preparation for class teaching. Specifically, the majority of students accused their lecturers of reading their PowerPoint presentations aloud:

“Oh! One lecturer, it’s like he’s reading the slides for us. You know I can read those slides by myself at home!” (R16, female, business student).

And:

“Some lecturers read slides; reading for what? (I can read it myself). Nobody wants to turn up to this class because it is too boring” (R13, female, business student).

Students find this teaching style boring and therefore lack motivation to attend the class.

In regard to self-study, six students felt that the lecturers focused mainly on this. The lecturers asked students to research individual topics by themselves or “gave the bullet points and said that it was our responsibility to read them in detail by ourselves” (R12, female, business student). Interestingly, the data revealed that some subjects involved no teaching from lecturers at all but the students were given the reading list for each topic in preparation for discussing the topics the next week. This focus on individual outcomes learning may have been intended to encourage students’ thinking skills; however, as one student said:

“Student discussion without lecturer judgements about whether something is right or wrong is useless” (R11, male, psychology student).

The results reflect the fact that students in this study may be unfamiliar with the self-study environment in UK universities, and this may lead to dissatisfaction. This could be because the teaching style in Thailand is teacher-centred and feeds students with knowledge. Hence, differentiation of study styles may play an important role in teaching. Pimpa (2011) claims that Western students are more familiar with a student-centred learning environment; in contrast, students from Asia rely more on a teacher-centred approach. This difference in teaching and learning styles can also be found in the research by Farland (2006) and Smith and Khawaja (2011). For example, in Farland (2006: 5), one of the respondents noted that, "At home the teachers feed me with knowledge, but in the UK they help me pick up the spoon and learn to feed myself!". Additionally, a study by Lord and Dawson (2002) offers similar results to those in this study. Lord and Dawson (2002) investigated the perceptions of Chinese and Indian students regarding the teaching at Thames Valley University. The results showed that students from China mentioned topics similar to those in this study, such as students being required to undertake pre-reading by themselves, and that: "The tutors (in China) will go through every chapter by chapter - something like that. But here it's not so. The tutor only gives you a guideline or something like that. They won't go through the lesson chapter by chapter" (p.12). From the comments made by the students in Lord and Dawson's (2002) study and Farland's (2005) study, it appears that Asian students may face similar experiences with lecturers' teaching styles, which confirms that UK and Asian teaching styles are different.

Four students had positive perceptions of the contact between lecturers and students. Contact with lecturers was very appreciated. One student stated:

"Lecturers are very nice; I can meet them after the lecture and ask questions about what I don't understand from the lecture. Before, I never expected contact with the lecturers; I thought they might be the same as Thai lecturers. I'm totally wrong because the lecturers take care of students like customers" (R1, female, business student).

Further, being able to make appointments with lecturers for personal meetings was also appreciated by students. They felt that lecturers showed a willingness to help and also provided helpful information. In addition, e-mail communication was fast and effective.

The third perception of lecturers involved teaching content. Unfortunately, the outcome confirmed that teaching content experiences were seen as unfavourable, as commented on by five out of the seventeen students. One student commented on teaching content that had been modified:

“This year one of the modules has been modified from last year. The lecturers and the textbooks have been changed from last year. The lecturers in this module focused on policy and human resources, which was similar to another module. I felt that it was useless” (R12, female, business student).

Another student complained about subject content which had no practical application in reality. An example quotation from a finance and accounting student was:

“...in one of my subjects, the lecturer teaches his own model software which nobody in the world uses or knows because he invented this software. Rather, he should teach me SPSS, which is a data processing program... I am really not happy with it. You see, in my dissertation I should use the program I have been taught in the lectures but I cannot use it. I have got to use SPSS in my dissertation and I have got to learn how to use SPSS by myself...” (R16, female, business student).

In terms of academic knowledge, both positive and negative comments were made by eight out of the seventeen students. On the positive side, four students said that lecturers had good academic knowledge and were professional in the subject they taught. A psychology student said that:

“The lecturers have knowledge and they teach interesting topics outside the textbooks which can connect well to other topics in the textbooks. It is like

they have prepared what to teach each week well. When students ask questions, they absolutely have good answers; sometimes students challenge their lecturers by asking some silly questions but the lecturers still have good answers” (R4, female, business student).

On the other hand, four students commented on negative experiences of lecturers’ knowledge levels. These comments included the following examples:

“To be honest, if we want to get academic knowledge, Thailand can offer world-class quality lecturers at cheaper cost.” (R13, female, business student)

“I think it is slightly lower than I expected. I see that the knowledge and expertise of the Thai lecturers at the Thammasat University (one of the famous Thai universities) is no less than or equivalent to the lecturers here. I bet that they are qualified to teach in the UK” (R5, male, business student).

“The lecturers here are very good researchers rather than teachers. I feel they have limited knowledge, only the research they did, just one research area; that’s all they know in their whole life” (R15, female, psychology student).

The above illustrations indicate that lecturers’ academic knowledge did not meet students’ requirements. This is perhaps due to students having high expectations regarding the lecturers’ knowledge and because their concept of the quality of lecturers was based on previous experiences (Hill, 1995). Students such as R15 also felt that the lecturers’ research knowledge was not important in terms of the teaching ability of their lecturers. However, in reality, lecturers in universities are required to be good at both teaching and research. In other words, R15 overlooked the research expertise and ability of their lecturers. Furthermore, a previous study has confirmed that UK universities are chosen by international students primarily on the basis of educational standards and international recognition (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Russell 2005). Additionally, the British Council uses these factors

as strengths to promote UK universities (British Council, 2009b). These factors may form students' expectations of teaching quality via external communications such as prospectuses, brochures and leaflets (Hill, 1995).

Five students raised another issue relating to the experience of teaching by lecturers. Particularly in the expectation phase, the students have positive expectations of the teaching experience the lecturers would have. After they had undertaken some coursework they reported some negative experiences. A female student commented that:

“It is much less than I expected; there are quite a lot of new lecturers, thus sheets and teaching material are not well prepared. It's like they don't know the direction of teaching and don't know appropriate content to manage within the time of one lecture. I did not know they were new until I wondered why they read the whole of the PowerPoint slides and later I found that they were new... you know I wanted teaching experience because I knew that university is famous for finance” (R9, female, business student).

Given this quotation, it can be said that the students were disappointed with regard to some of the teaching experience of the lecturers. Their lecturers were supposed to have had moderate amounts of teaching experience and to know how to teach the subject properly. This requirement may result from the fact that the university is very famous in this area of study. The students' view of teaching quality was lowered by new and inexperienced lecturers. Managing appropriate content to teach in each lecture was an important issue for R9 in order to motivate her into paying attention to the lecture. It was also clear from this quote that although the lecturers had good educational background profiles, this was not as important as the techniques and teaching experience of the lecturers. In other words, the students overlooked their lecturers' qualifications but paid their attention to lecturers' levels of experience.

Six students focused on the accents of the lecturers. In fact, foreign lecturers are welcome in higher education institutions in the UK. According to figures from the

European University Institute (2009), almost 50% of the academic staff in UK universities in 2007 was non-UK citizens. Although they have expertise and professionalism, their accents may be an issue. The current interviews found that the students struggled with non-British accents such as Russian, Chinese, Indian, etc. R16, a female student, explained her difficulties in the following comment:

“...because English is not their mother language, messages which have been sent from lecturers to students may be lost, or have poor levels of meaning. They may have been trying to explain some specific points but they were still unclear and caused communication problems. Sometimes they solved this problem by leaving that point without clarifying. Sometimes I pay too much attention to trying to understand lecturers’ accents; consequently I lose the message they teach. In general, out of 100 per cent of the message, the sender may send us 70-80 per cent, we receive 50-60 per cent if it is sent by a native speaker but it may be less than that if the sender is a non-native speaker. It’s a threat for me”.

Similar comments on accents were also made by the rest of the five students. These showed that poor communication because of accents may decrease the learning outcomes of students. This was not about the lecturers’ knowledge but about how knowledge was transferred to the receivers (students). This was in line with a study by Raelin and Schermerhorn (1994) which showed that language and approaches to learning were among the biggest obstacles to cross-cultural online learning.

In addition to accents, marking and feedback from lecturers also affected experiences of teaching quality. The interview data indicated that marking and feedback was a negative issue. The following statements explain this point.

“For one of my essays, I was told by the department that my tutor would mark it. My topic was approved by my tutor and I was supervised by my tutor until the essay was submitted. Surprisingly, I got a score of 48, which meant that I failed. Later, I found out that the person marking my thesis was not my tutor but a module coordinator. He said that my essay was very good

but it was not what he wanted. You know, it was supposed to be my tutor marking the essay because the topic had been approved by my tutor, not the module coordinator. This is terrible..." (R6, female, humanities student).

The same student further said that:

"... when a first marker and a second marker are both marking the same essay, the first marker is the one who makes the decision if the two markers disagree. For my essay, lecturer A was the first marker and lecturer B was the second marker. In contrast, for my friends, lecturer B was the first marker and lecturer A was the second marker. It's common sense that the first and the second markers should be in the same pattern for the whole class, isn't it?" (R6, female, humanities student).

The R6 illustration uncovers a lack of management and communication between the lecturers and the school over feedback to students. R16 believed that these problems caused her to fail that essay.

A similar comment from a male student showed that he was also disappointed with the feedback he got because they did not explain clearly what criteria they marking for in the essay. This was his comment:

"A Russian teacher marked the essay without any criteria. For example, two essays were of similar quality but she gave different marks. Fortunately, our friend found out that she started with the total score and then fragmented the score according to each point, whilst other lecturers gave scores to each individual point and then summed them up to the total score. Usually, lecturers gave feedback comments based on what students did wrong but this lecturer gave no explanations. She just wrote down that the essay was not understandable or that the relationships between what we explained were wrong, so we didn't even know how they were wrong" (R11, male, psychology student).

A further comment on experience referred to the tutorial classes provided by the school. In fact, master's degree students are provided with tutorial classes after each lecture (2-3 hour lecture + 1 hour tutorial). Although tutorials are an opportunity for students to ask questions of tutors, practice exercises they have got after the lecture and revise the lecture notes on the topic, the outcomes revealed that four students had negative perceptions of tutorial classes. One of the problems was that they disliked the fact that the lecturers and tutors were different people as they felt this resulted in a lack of connection of subject content between class and tutorial.

The last perception relating to students' experiences related to lecturers' supervision and was commented on by two students who completed dissertations. On one hand, one student commented that her supervisor was very supportive of her dissertation work:

"I'm not sure about any other supervisors but for me my supervisor is very helpful, fast and gives guidelines. I'm not sure if this is because I'm an international student or not but I feel that she is very supportive of me" (R15, female, psychology student).

On the other hand, a negative comment came from another student:

"I sent my proposal to my supervisor and she replied that she could supervise me because the topic was strongly related to her interests, so I decided to select her to be my dissertation supervisor. After the selection, she replied that my topic was very complicated and asked me to do another topic. Later I discovered that this topic would fulfil the supervisor's own research aims. This made me very unhappy with her. Furthermore, she told me that she had all data for the new topic but she didn't. I had to start from scratch and it took a month to collect the raw data from financial databases. In addition, it was difficult to contact her by email when I needed her suggestions because she was on holiday. She replied two weeks later, which was too late, and just said 'get on with it... all I can say... see you

when I back from my trip'. I was so disappointed with her." (R16, female, business student)

This quotation shows that lack of time, being difficult to contact and irresponsibility on the part of supervisors can cause negative experiences for students. Students who were not required to complete a dissertation did not have supervision experiences and therefore did not comment on this point. This group of students involved almost two-thirds of the students participating in the interviews.

In summary, among all the comments made by the students regarding their lecturers, the three most frequently mentioned factors were teaching quality, lecturers' levels of knowledge and lecturers' accents. The least frequently mentioned factor was supervision; however, this may be due to the fact that the majority of the students were not required to complete a dissertation.

It seems that lecturers' accents may not be a significant source of dissatisfaction for students because foreign lecturers may provide an opportunity for students to widen their vision to include the expertise of lecturers from all over the world. The major consideration with regard to lecturers should be their quality and expertise because previous research has claimed that students select courses according to the reputations of the teaching staff (Hughes, 1988)

Mazzarol (1998) has also concluded that the quality and expertise of staff is a critical success factor for educational institutes aiming to market themselves globally. Additionally, international academic success, for example if one of the academic staff has won a Nobel Prize, has a tremendous impact on a university's league table performance and can enhance the reputation of university (Taylor and Braddock, 2007). It can be understood that if students chose a university according to university league tables or university reputations, it is not surprising if they have high expectations about the quality of lecturers.

It appears that lecturers' personalities, which were mentioned in the expectation phase, were not mentioned in this phase. This means personality and appearance

may not be important factors in students' university experiences. This can be explained by the fact that students focus on tangible dimensions such as knowledge, teaching methods, relationships and feedback from lecturers, rather than on their appearance (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

6.3.2.2. Perceptions of Teaching Support Facilities Experiences

After teaching quality, the interview questions moved on to teaching support facilities such as classrooms and electronic equipment. Generally, all the comments covered two topics, classroom facilities and electronic equipment, as shown in Table 6.5. The average perception score was 3.18, which means there was a neutral perception of the teaching support facilities provided by the university.

Table 6.5: Perceptions of Teaching Support Facilities

Respondents	Electronic facilities		Classrooms
	clicker	PPT, microphone,	
R1	X		
R2	✓	✓	
R3			
R4			X
R5		✓	
R6			X
R7			✓
R8	✓	✓	
R9		✓	✓
R10			
R11			
R12			
R13	✓		✓
R14	✓		X
R15		✓	X
R16	✓	✓	X
R17	X	✓	
Mean score 3.18			
✓ = positive experience			
X = negative experience			

Source: Author

In terms of classroom facilities, there were both positive and negative comments from eight students. On the positive side, three students just said that the classrooms were ok and of a generally good standard, especially the classrooms in the business department:

“In my department, the classrooms were in good condition. I usually had lectures in the finance building and the main lecture theatre at the business department. For some subjects I had lectures in A Building, which belongs to another faculty. It is in a little bit worse condition than the business building. However, the overall classrooms at my university were ok for me” (R9, female, business student).

Conversely, five students who had negative classroom experiences commented that although some classrooms were in good condition, some were not suitable for studying in:

“They were very old, very cold, very humid and very dark because they were in the basement of the building. I felt that they were not as well presented as I expected” (R4, female, business student).

Similar arguments were made by other female students:

“... in a subject using computer room, we got a computer room which had fewer computers than the number of students in the class, although the number of students in the class had been given to the school earlier...” (R6, female, humanities student).

And:

“In financial modelling [subject], we got to bring our own laptop to practice in class but the room we got had no sockets for our laptops. It was a 3 hour-class; after 2 hours the laptops ran out of battery power so we had no computers to work on in the last hour. I’m not sure it is the responsibility of anyone but, if I were the lecturer, I would change the room or report it the school to solve the problem...” (R16, female, business student).

The above quotations from R6 and R16 verified that classroom management may affect perceptions of classroom facilities. The classrooms were supposed to match study purposes and the number of students in any one lecture. It can be seen that R16 saw that this problem could be solved but she was disappointed that her lecturer disregarded it.

In terms of electronic equipment, which was the second perception, comments were made by ten students. The students were basically satisfied by what the university provided in ordinary classrooms throughout the campus, including power points, microphones and projectors. One male student stated that:

“The equipment is good and high-tech. In comparison to the equipment in Thai universities, UK universities provide better technology than in Thailand’s” (R5, male, business student).

Furthermore, seven of the ten students made particular comments about clickers. All of them are students from the same school. Students from other schools did not report experiences with clickers. According to the data from the interview, clickers are new equipment that the school first provided for its students in the 2010-11 academic year. Their function is to initiate student participation by way of answering questions in a lecture; for example, students click to answer A, B or C to a particular question. Clickers were the only piece of equipment which the students noted that “Thai universities do not have” (R13, female, business student). Although many of the students were excited and were pleased about the clicker facility, some students claimed that:

“There is only one subject that uses clickers” (R1, female, business student).

And:

“I never used it until I returned it to the department” (R17, male, business student).

It can be seen from these two illustrations that although students were excited about clickers at the beginning, there was some dissatisfaction because they would have liked to use them more frequently in lectures (e.g. R1 and R17). Generally speaking, it might be better if the lecturers adapted their teaching style so as to support the use of clickers in lectures.

The interview outcomes revealed that the level of actual experience of teaching support facilities was not only formed by how good or high-tech classroom facilities and electronic equipment were. Experiences were also formed by the performances of the lecturers who used these facilities. In other words, although teaching support facilities were generally of the same standard as other universities, it appears that if the lecturers are not used to or do not make use of them, students may have negative experiences. Some students, for instance, commented that some of their lecturers liked to use blackboards rather than PowerPoint or other technological aids when teaching.

In summary, physical conditions such as new classrooms may be a priority factor in students' experiences of teaching support facilities. In addition, it appears that university provision of sufficient electronic equipment to support high-quality teaching (e.g. power points and projectors) is also important to students' perceptions of their experiences. However, lecturer's skills in using this equipment also need to be considered by the university. Generally, training sessions in order to familiarise lecturers with technological equipment may be important.

6.3.3 Perceptions of Experiences of Support Staff

Previous studies suggest that the performances of non-academic staff have an impact on students' perceptions of service quality (e.g. Arambewela et al., 2005; Douglas et al., 2006). For example, Arambewela et al. (2005) state that activities such as enrolment and timetabling that are provided by administrative staff can have a strong influence on students' satisfaction. Galloway (1998) found that staff who dress smartly, are never too busy to help and provide personally convenient

opening hours were the main predictors for the performance of office staff in the view of students.

Table 6.6: Perceptions of Experiences of Support Staff

Respondent	Attitude to work				Knowledge of job	Working efficiency
	Good service	Friendly	Willing to help	Patient		
R1	X					
R2	✓					
R3						✓
R4	✓					
R5		✓	✓	✓		
R6	X				X	
R7					✓	✓
R8	✓					
R9			✓			
R10				✓		
R11						✓
R12		✓				✓
R13					✓	✓
R14	✓			✓		
R15			✓			
R16	✓					
R17	✓					✓
Mean score 4.12						
✓ = positive experience						
X = negative experience						

Source: Author

In our research, the students were asked for their views of the support staff at the university and were asked to rate their perceptions of the services the staff provided. After their actual experiences, the mean score in this category was 4.12, which was an increase from the 3.82 scored in the expectation phase. This means that the students had a positive perception of non-academic staff. Table 6.6 summarises the comments.

Initially, the interview data indicated that the majority of students had not had much contact with support staff; usually, students made contact for the purpose of submitting essays and receiving them back. Students' experiences of support staff can be classified into three areas: their attitude to the work, their knowledge of the job and working efficiency.

Almost all students had positive perceptions in relation to attitude to the work. There were six comments about good service, two comments on the friendliness of staff, three comments on a willingness to help and three comments on being patient. The statements below express some of the positive experiences mentioned above:

R9, female, business student:

“They are willing to help with my problems...”

R10, female, engineering student:

“They are wonderful... I am not sure how they serve the local students but for me they speak very clear, slowly, and stress words without me asking them to slow down.”

Only two students had negative perceptions of the service provided by the staff. One commented that:

“Some staff are fussy. They like arguing with students. You know, we are not children; we are over 20 years of age. It would be great if they could control their tempers and calm down” (R6, female humanities student)

In terms of knowledge of the job, both negative and positive perceptions were found. In particular, two students expressed their appreciation of knowledgeable staff. One commented that she had never been disappointed with the staff because, whatever questions she asked, the staff could clarify wisely. In contrast, another student commented on a negative experience of staff. Here is her comment:

“One of the officers in my department is always moody and always has arguments with both local students and international students. In our department students get the essay feedback from this officer. However, when we ask for this feedback she usually says that she does not know

about it. She should know because it is what she is supposed to know and it is her job" (R6, female, humanities student).

The final perceived experience referred to the working efficiency of staff, as commented on by six students. These students were satisfied with the staff due to the fact that they worked very fast. This is an example of the comments:

"I wanted to change the module in the second semester; however, changing the module was allowed in the first semester only. I contacted one of the support staff to ask for help. The next day, I got an email from her saying that the problem had been solved. It was very quick and very convenient" (R3, female, business student).

It is clear that the interview results suggest that positive attitudes to service, knowledge of the job and good working efficiency are important factors for non-academic staff. Staff members need to show positive and friendly attitudes and provide pleasant service. The low number of negative views may be because the contacts between students and staff are not very frequent and they are usually via electronic mail, rather than being face-to-face. Furthermore, when comparing these experiences with students' prior experiences in Thailand, it should be remembered that support staff in Thailand may have responsibility for hundreds of students, which sometimes results in bad moods or slow responses from staff to students. In contrast, staff in the UK may have responsibility for smaller numbers of students, which benefits their work efficiency.

It should be noted that in their experiences of staff, the students were more aware of working attitudes and efficiency. They had less experience of staff members' knowledge of their jobs and support systems, both of which were commented on in the expectation phase in the previous chapter.

While our results show that the students were quite happy with the support services provided, shown by the mean score of 4.12, much research in relation to student satisfaction with university support staff has reported that students may not

satisfied with this aspect. This can be seen in a study by Douglas et al. (2006) of Liverpool John Moores University and the study at a University of Education in Germany carried out by Gruber et al. (2010).

6.3.4 Perceptions of Experiences of Library, Computing and IT Facilities

6.3.4.1 Perceptions of Library Experiences

An essential facility provided by the university to all students is the library. Most international students use libraries frequently for borrowing books and research work (Arambewela, 2003). Evidence suggests that students evaluate the performance of a library in terms of its size, external appearance, number of books, resources, and private and group study rooms (Arambewela, 2003).

Table 6.7 shows that the mean experience perception score for the university library was 2.41; this was the lowest score for perceptions of experiences. This score suggests that the students had low perceptions of their experiences.

There are three libraries on the campus. The results in this study will focus on the main library only. This is because the main library, as the name suggests, is the one that most students use. It has been in the process of being renovated since the mid of 2010 and is due to be completed in December 2011.

Generally, the majority of perceptions were negative rather than positive. As can be seen from Table 6.7, the students' perceptions of the library can be divided into 2 main categories: physical appearance and non-physical features. The physical appearance included the building as a whole, seating, lighting and room facilities etc. The non-physical features were library resources such as books, electronic resources and the searching-borrowing system.

Table 6.7: Perceptions of Library Experiences

Res	Physical Features						Non-Physical Features		
	Seating	Noise	Lighting	Building	Group Discussion Areas	Under Construction	Books	E-resources	Borrowing
R1							X		
R2	X	X		X			X		
R3	X			X	✓			✓	
R4	X	X			X				✓
R5				✓					✓
R6	X		X	X		X	X	✓	✓
R7				X	✓		X	✓	✓
R8	X		X		X	X			✓
R9	X			X	X	X		X	✓
R10		X					X	X	
R11				X			X	✓	
R12				X			X	✓	
R13	X			X				✓	✓
R14				X			X		✓
R15	X					X	X		✓
R16	X					X	X		✓
R17	X						X	✓	✓
Mean score 2.41									
✓ = positive experience									
X = negative experience									

Source: Author

16 out of 17 students commented on physical appearance. The physical aspect did not meet students' requirements due to the following factors. First of all, seating was the biggest problem, and was commented on by 10 students. For example, "Library seating is not sufficient for user demand", said R3. This was especially the case in the examination period, when many of students wanted to use the library; hence, many students decided to work in their accommodation. Secondly, there was a problem with the library building as a whole. The results found that studying in the library was not preferable for students. One student noted:

“The library is very old, very dark. Although it opens 24-7, it is not a proper atmosphere for studying. It is too cold inside” (R14, female, business student).

This quotation suggests that the students were concerned about the appearance and warmth of the inside of the building. Although R14 gave this comment, she accepted that she had no choice but to use the library as she was alerted to the need to study when she saw other students reading their textbooks there.

Thirdly, the library was under construction. Comments from the students suggested that the inconvenience caused by the construction work raised their level of dissatisfaction. Although alternative libraries were provided for students on the campus, the students said that this was still not convenient:

“Due to the construction of the library, the books on ancient history that I needed were affected because they were moved into all three libraries. Some books I found in the database as having been moved to another library but when I went there they were somewhere else. I had to chase after books I needed and now I have become a book chasing expert [laughing]” (R6, female, humanities student).

Furthermore, topics such as not enough spaces for group discussion, noise and lighting were also discussed. The above comments (R3, R14 and R6) indicate that physical appearance plays an important role in students’ experiences. A new big building with a high-class interior may be preferable to an old, small building and it was an ideal library for the international students.

Non-physical factors were commented on by all seventeen students. One of the most significant factors was books. The results showed that the number of books in the library was not parallel with the number of students on the campus. Only limited copies of books were available. Sometimes there was only one copy of a book for the whole campus to share and were valid only in a ready text room. A female student explained that that “Borrowing books from the ready text room can valid

only few hours for a book” (R7, female, business student). In addition to this, it was stated that:

“There are not enough books. This academic year is 2010 but the books in the library were 2001 and 2002 editions. Newer editions are available on the market. Even the library in my country has more up-to-date books than this library” (R16, female, business student).

This illustration confirms that some students perceived that the books in the library were not current.

Beyond books, nine comments were made about electronic resources and this was one of the few positive experiences in this section. The students were more satisfied with e-resources such as online journal and e-books than with the printed books. An interesting comment made by one student was:

“I use online journals a lot. It’s great. I think it is exciting to see some spectacular journals that are not available in the Thai universities. The e-resources are very broad and are easy to find an article. Not only are there online journals, the e-resource also provides ancient texts in Greek and Latin and it is connected to other databases... It is convenient as I just search from the system” (R6, female, humanities student).

This quotation indicates that this student was delighted with the convenience of the electronic resources provided by the university. They were easy to use and automatically linked to other databases, facilitating her studies. It is interesting to note that R6 had never experienced using electronic resources before, and this factor may have led to a positive perception. Although the e-resources did not cover some journals, the students felt that they provided an acceptable service.

The final issue under this section is the searching-borrowing system. The interview results indicate that the borrowing system at the library was not only convenient for

students but also helped them manage their time and resources. Eleven students expressed satisfaction with this system.

In summary, our respondents were not satisfied with the university library's performance. This was not the case for many previous studies. Library performance was reported to be satisfactory by students in research by Ward and Masgoret (2004), Merrick (2004), Mori (2006) and Gruber et al. (2010).

6.3.4.2 Perceptions of Computing and IT Experiences

Computing facilities and IT support comprise another factor for which the international students had a high expectation mean score. Kinnell (1989) illustrates that providing good welfare facilities, accommodation and a high standard of teaching support is important for commercial education. It is also an essential condition of a caring educational institution (Kinnell, 1989).

A summary of the interview results is shown in Table 6.8. The outcomes from the interview indicated that the experience perception score for computing and an IT facility was 3.29, which was a relatively neutral perception. This result is consistent with previous studies indicating that students were satisfied with the computing and IT support provided by universities (Merrick, 2004; Ward and Masgoret, 2004; Mai, 2005; Mori, 2006; Douglas et al., 2006; Gruber et al., 2010).

Table 6.8: Perceptions of Computing and IT Experiences

Res.	Computers	IT			
		Database resource	E-learning	Files and storage	IT assistance
R1	✓	X			
R2	✓				
R3	✓		✓		
R4		X	✓	✓	
R5		X			✓
R6				✓	
R7		X	✓		
R8	✓	X			
R9	X	X			
R10	✓				
R11	✓				✓
R12			✓		✓
R13		X		✓	
R14	✓	X			
R15	✓				
R16	✓	X			
R17	✓				
Mean score 3.29					
✓ = positive experience					
X = negative experience					

Source: Author

In general, the results showed that the students had positive perceptions of computers (10 comments). The comments included:

“The number of computers was sufficient to meet students demand” (R1, female, business student).

And:

“There are many computers. Whenever I want to use a computer, one is always available, especially at the business department. They are sufficient to meet student demand” (R3, female, business student).

Although many of the students said there were plenty of computers, R9 also complained that “they were not new and they were slow” (female, business student). Thus, R9 did not use university computers regularly. The students’ answers can be linked to the expectation phase. The fact that all the students who participated in this study had their own laptops meant that the university’s

computing facilities were not regarded as essential, and the interview data confirm that students overlooked this as an important facility.

Concerning perceptions of IT services, some negativity was expressed about database resources (9 comments). The following quotations depict a lack of facilities:

“In the department, there are two computers for DataStream and one for Thomson Reuters and they are not sufficient for users. When the projects are due, they are all due at the same time; thus, students have to book in a slot sheet at night from 2 a.m. until morning” (R16, female, business student).

And:

“I would like the school to increase the number of software packages; for example, having one station for the Bloomberg software package and two stations for DataStream for the whole university is not acceptable. We should have more! The school should not provide database resources for the finance students only; economics students like me would like to have ‘Bank Scope’ as an economics database as well” (R1, female, business student).

A similar statement on database resources commented on the booking system used to reserve databases:

“I think the school should have a more efficient system for booking. Students book by putting their names on a piece of paper [on the wall of the room]. Some students put their names on the whole of the paper and do not follow the booking rules. No support staff are in charge of booking database resources” (R9, female, business student).

This information from these quotations confirms a lack of database resource facilities in the university. These students saw database resources as an important factor for them because they had to use these databases for their assignments or

essays. This may cause safety issues for students if they have to come to the school to utilise the database at midnight or 2 am. Further, the undermanaged booking system may worsen their experiences of IT facilities. The department should offer more database resource stations for students in order to facilitate more convenient study and show care for students. If the students had access to sufficient numbers of database stations they would not have to come to the database room at night. Additionally, it should be noted that all the negative comments on database resources came from the students in the business department, which includes 76% of the respondents, but it was not found to be a problem for students in other faculties. This should be taken into consideration before making a general assumption about the whole university.

In terms of other IT services, eight students made positive comments. Beyond electronic databases, other IT service included an e-learning system, file and storage systems and IT assistance. The university provided all IT facilities through a one-stop service which was accessed by logging in with a username and password and also provided access to course materials and online interaction. This result supports the research undertaken by Mai (2005) in that quality and accessibility of IT facilities has a direct impact on the overall impression of education quality. Furthermore, Pimpa (2011) supports the idea that e-learning is equivalent to webCT and functions to support students' interactions with learning materials via the internet. The following illustration explains the benefits of e-learning and shows how the students were impressed by it:

“I am impressed by the lecture recorded in e-learning. Because it is a record I can see the movements of the lecturer. I can see the points that the lecturer makes more clearly than with the voice recorder” (R7, female, business student).

And:

“I can revise the lectures and go back to re-watch them as many times I like. Sometimes in the lecture room I can't hear clearly but in e-learning I can see and hear clearly. If I don't understand some words the lecturer has said, I

can pause it so I can get more important details than I got in the lecture”
(R12, female, business student).

These quotes highlight the fact that students whose first language is not English may have some difficulties when studying in the lecture room. This e-learning facility may enhance their study experience. Lin and Yi (1997) also highlight the fact that language difficulties appear to affect the academic performance of international students. Having good quality supportive services such as e-learning or other online learning tools can encourage students to interact in the learning process (Pimpa, 2011). In this way, universities can create positive perceptions of themselves in the minds of students.

6.3.5 Perceptions of Accommodation Experiences

According to Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), accommodation is ranked fourth among leading reasons for international students choosing the UK for overseas study. This information indicates the importance of accommodation quality provided by an institution for international students. In this study, the mean score for accommodation was 3.82 (Table 6.9), suggesting that the students had relatively good perceptions of their accommodation experiences. In the expectation phase, some students showed high expectations for accommodation because it would be their home for the whole year while studying in the UK. High expectations also caused by the information on accommodation they had received and the ranking of the university. However, the results of the experience phase indicate that their perceptions were lower than their expectations. This result is also consistent with the study of UKCOSA (2004), which indicated that concern about accommodation decreased dramatically after arrival.

Table 6.9: Perceptions of Accommodation Experiences

Res.	Room & Facility	Accommodation Services	Safety	Price
R1	✓			
R2	✓			
R3		✓	✓	
R4	✓	✓	✓	
R5	✓			X
R6	✓	✓	✓	X
R7	✓			
R8	✓	✓		
R9	✓		✓	
R10	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
R11	✓			X
R12				X
R13	✓		✓	
R14	✓		✓	
R15	✓			
R16	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
R17	✓			
Mean score 3.82				
✓ = positive experience				
X = negative experience				

Source: Author

As can be seen from the summary in Table 6.9, only fifteen students participated in this category due to two students being excluded as they lived in private houses. The outcome revealed that fourteen out of the fifteen students had positive perception across three areas: rooms and facilities, services and safety. The comments on rooms and facilities included:

“Everything is provided in the room, such as an iron, a vacuum, a lamp. The room is quite big and has a good layout. The bathroom is of a proper, beautiful size. The system in the building is good” (R4, female, business student).

And:

“The room is very quiet and private. I have never heard noise from the room next door. I have got a microwave, a kettle, an iron, so I don’t need to buy anything” (R6, female, humanities student).

Many students commented on the service they got from the accommodation management team. A sample illustration is: “when something in my room was out of order, for example, my lamp, I just emailed the management team and the next day they would send someone to fix it” (R4, female, business student).

The final positive perception concerned safety. Six students agreed that their accommodation was very safe. This was because key cards were used to enter the accommodation. Additionally, fire policies had been set: “I can be sure about safety because the management team regularly inspects the fire alarm” (R4, female, business student).

It appeared that the students just needed ordinary accommodation such as clean rooms, good facilities and safety as these were frequently mentioned in a favourable manner. A study by Khozaei et al. (2011) of 752 Malaysian students' preferences factors in relation to accommodation found that facilities and amenities, visual features (appearance), location, security, convenience and social contact were all important factors. It appears that the results of this study include similar factors to those Khozaei et al. (2011) found. In addition, the results of this study also cover the bottom step of Maslow's theory of needs, i.e. physiological and safety needs.

On the other hand, although accommodation fees were not commented on in the expectation phase, they gave rise to a considerably negative perception in this experience phase, as commented on by four students. Arambewela and Hall (2008) highlight the fact that international students know that the cost of accommodation is higher than in their own countries but they expect the cost to be reasonable. The data from the interviews confirm that students thought the accommodation was relatively expensive £6,000 (300,000 baht) per year. This is consistent with Ford et al.'s (1999) study of the service quality perception of US students. They found that the cost of the housing was one of the most disappointing factors. Ford et al. (1999) also tested their ideas on New Zealand students, using a similar survey to that with the US students. The results showed

that the cost of accommodation was the second most disappointing factor for New Zealand students. These evidences confirm that international students do not satisfy with accommodation cost in their host countries.

6.3.6 Perception of Social Life

In addition to considering the academic demands of a UK university, this research aims to provide a wider picture of students' social life in the UK. In the expectation phase, the students expressed a variety of expectations related to clubs, activities, social life and the hope of having international and/or British friends. This experience phase will track whether their views have changed since attending university in the UK.

6.3.6.1 Perceptions of Experiences of Social Activities and Clubs

In terms of activities, the mean score of 3.41 (Table 6.1) indicates that the students had a relatively positive experience. However, all seventeen students said that they focused on their studies rather than activities; thus, they rarely participated in any societies or clubs. Students agreed that many activities were offered to students and the information was passed to students via email or other types of communication but they did not join, as the following quotes illustrate:

“I have rarely joined the activities provided by the university. I don't really have time because I have to study hard, especially in the second semester, there are loads of assignments to be finished and many of them have to be submitted at the same time” (R2, female, business student).

“I get lots of information on activities via Facebook but I have never joined. I would love to join but I have spent most of my time studying. If I have to spend time on activities or social life, I will never have enough time for study. You see, I have assignments or group meetings almost every evening. For me, all the activities are more suitable for undergrad students

rather than post-grads because they have time” (R4, female, business student).

“I think there are many activities for students but the students who join are undergraduate students. Master’s degree students don’t have time. I have to hurry to study hard because my course is short. It’s only 9 months without a dissertation” (R14, female, business student).

It is clear from these accounts that for post-grad students study loads and lack of time make participation in activities difficult, although the university has worked hard to promote the number of activities they provide for students. When asked whether they had joined any clubs or societies, one student had joined a society (choral society) and two students had joined the university sports centre, while the rest replied that they had never joined any clubs or societies. This suggests that such students may not be greatly concerned with societies, clubs and other activities. The results of this study may contradict the study of Mori (2006). Mori (2006) found that international students were positive about joining clubs and societies as over half of them (56 per cent) belonged to a club or a society. However, it should be noted that Mori’s (2006) sample included EU students as international students. These EU students may be closer to British students in terms of culture and lifestyle than Asian students.

Furthermore, according to the interview data, four students felt that the activities in the university appeared to be more appropriate for undergraduate than postgraduate students (see above quote). This result is consistent with Merrick’s finding (2004: 70) that “postgraduate students, and research students especially, were less likely than undergraduates to make use of organised social activities or students’ union facilities at their institution”.

Outside classroom activities may benefit students in finding a balance between study life and social life. Social activities can help international students to overcome feelings of homesickness and loneliness (Lewins, 1990). Many universities have made an effort to encourage international students to participate

in these activities because they would like to help students overcome these situations. They also encourage mixing between home and international students. In this way international students will have new social experiences, a more positive attitude towards people from different backgrounds and even psychological encouragement because they can adjust to life overseas and share the feeling that they are a member of the university (McDowell and Montgomery, 2009). In reality, the lack of time to join activities experienced by international students may be a barrier to enjoying a non-academic life and to enhancing friendship with British students. In Merrick's (2004) study, it was found that participation in any type of activity on university campus increased the likelihood of friendships with local students. Many international students returned home disappointed with this aspect of their social life and were likely to warn people at home about this negative experience (Kinnell, 1990).

6.3.6.2 Perceptions of Friendship Experiences

One wish of overseas students is to socialize with British students and visit the homes of their British friends but in reality there has been limited success with achieving this (Lewins, 1990). This seems to be the case in this study. The perception score regarding friends in Table 6.10 is 3.24, which indicates a neutral perception and the interview data results are consistent with the study carried out by Lewins (1990).

The data in Table 6.10 show that only eight students had British friends. Those who had British friends said that they have a limited number. For example:

“I have only two British close friends” (R14, female, business student).

Surprisingly, the majority of students who had British friends did not express positive perceptions of them. Many students found that their friendships had barriers; language being among them. A female student pointed out that:

Table 6.10: Perceptions of Friendship Experiences

Res.	British friends	International friends	Thai friends
R1		✓	
R2		✓	
R3		✓	
R4	X		✓
R5		✓	
R6	X	✓	
R7	✓	✓	
R8		✓	✓
R9		✓	✓
R10	X	✓	✓
R11	X		✓
R12			✓
R13			✓
R14	✓	✓	
R15	X	✓	
R16		✓	
R17	X	✓	
Mean score 3.24			
✓ = positive experience			
X = negative experience			

Source: Author

“British students, they have their own group, their own society. It is difficult to get into their group because I can’t speak good English. I prefer to socialise with international friends because we are all from overseas and we are patient when communicating with each other because our English is not perfect” (R6, female, humanities student).

This comment indicates that students with poor English language skills may be ignored or excluded from local groups and therefore denied an opportunity to mix with them. Hayer and Ling (1994 cited in Yeh and Inose, 2003: 16) also found similar results in their study in the US, in that “language barriers often hinder international students from socially interacting with their American peers”. The interview data indicate that the international students were much more closely integrated with other international students and that relationships with British students remained on a superficial level. The students explained that British

students are reserved. This is consistent with the studies of Merrick (2004), Kinnell (1989), Lewins (1990), Kinnell (1990), Trahar and Hyland (2011) and Smith and Khawaja (2011), which show international students finding it difficult to integrate with local students. A study by Russell (2005: 73) found that UK students were predominantly “cold, uncaring, unfriendly, often rude, and closed to different cultures” in the view of international students. Additionally, the interview results found that some students felt they had experienced racism. This is reflected by the following quote:

“I feel that some local students don’t like to socialise with Asian friends. It’s like they insult Asians” (R4, female, business student).

This confirms that students have negative experiences of making friends with British students and supports the findings of Lewins (1990) and Kinnell (1989).

Furthermore, two students in the current study commented on cultural differences:

“...when I went out with British friends, I found that it was not fun. I can understand that social life styles are different. British students like to hang out in bars or pubs and they like to move from the first bar to the second bar and the third bar. It is their style, not our style. It is boring...” (R11, male, psychology student)

And:

“For me, British and international students are different, having a different culture. If we do not often go out for a drink with them in the evening, it is hard to have a close relationship with them” (R6, female, humanities student).

From these comments, it is clear that culture plays an important role in friendships with local students. British students tend to socialize in pubs and bars and the drinking culture plays an important role in making friendships. International students, in contrast, may not drink or get used to the drinking culture in the UK, and it is clear that this limits their chances of integration (Merrick, 2004 and Kinnell, 1990). It is also clear that drinking and alcohol in social activities do not play an

important role in other education-exporter countries (e.g. the US and Australia) because, according to a study by Merrick (2004), this issue is not mentioned, even though integration between students is an issue in many competitor countries.

In contrast with their British friends, thirteen students had positive comments about being friends with international students. Mori's (2006) study on international students' experiences in the UK found that 43 per cent of international students agreed that they had more international friends than UK friends. This is supported by the results of this study: the students mentioned that they had more international friends, especially from China and other Asian countries. The results extracted three factors which may be involved in forming friendships with international friends. The first factor was the number of international students in class, which was much higher than that of British students. This was especially the case in the business department, where the majority of the international students were Chinese. Some students claimed that their classes had no British students, so many international students ended up working within groups of other international students. The second factor related to language. The students were more confident when speaking to students for whom English was also not their first language. One female student said:

“Talking with Chinese friends I feel confident because we both are from Asia. If I don't understand what they say, they might not understand me as well [laughing]. It is quite simple. But when I talk to British friends I really feel nervous and not confident. If you ask me whether I can speak good English, I think I can. I can speak fluently with Chinese friends but with British friends, my God...they freak me out, shock me” (R7, female, business student).

This quotation also highlighted the point that communication with local students makes international students anxious because they are not fluent in English. This may be misinterpreted by local students. A study by Peacock and Harrison (2007), on how British students understand international students, found that in many cases British students viewed international students as “being distant, unfriendly,

rude or arrogant” (p.4), or even introverted, particularly when it came to international students whose English was below the level required for communication. Some local students also had the perception that international students liked to exclude themselves by socialising in the same nationality group and described them as annoying. Further, some local students felt that having conversations with international students required extra “attention, concentration and empathy to interact successfully” (Peacock and Harrison, 2007:4).

Thirdly, a feeling that non-UK students were a minority group was shared with international friends. One student commented that “...international friends have the willingness to understand what I’m going to say, and are more likely to support each other, while the British friends tend to ignore us” (P8, female, business student).

The study also found that some students preferred the experience of joining with other students from Thailand. This is consistent with Volet and Ang’s (1998 cited in Montgomery, 2009: 261) study, in which students preferred to work with their own people because “common cultural backgrounds facilitated communication and made group management easier”. A student in this study commented:

“My international friends, such as the Chinese or Taiwanese, socialize with their own groups. I also live and work with the Thai gang” (R14, female, business student).

This quotation reveals that cultural background is a significant factor in that students prefer to join with others of their own nationality. This might be a cause of the lack of opportunities for relationships with international and British students. As mentioned earlier (Section 6.3.6.1), the majority of the Thai students had not joined the university societies, clubs and other activities on campus, which may have resulted in fewer opportunities to make friends or interact with nationals over other countries through such activities. This is supported by Merrick’s finding (2004: 67) that “students who had participated in any type of activity on campus (e.g. joining clubs or societies, doing sport, drama, music, or volunteering) were more likely to

have UK friends than those who had not". Toyokawa and Toyokawa (2002) also state that students who participate in activities outside the classroom are more likely to have a chance to make host national friends.

Taken together, disappointment about friendship experiences may have resulted in the negative perceptions among the students. On this point, Trahar and Hyland (2011) suggest that cross-cultural interaction between international and home students can happen if academic staff encourages culturally-mixed group work in order to ensure that the group is diverse.

6.4 Service Quality Gap

According to Rowley (1997), understanding the longitudinal nature of experience is necessary so that higher education institutes can, where possible, beforehand to be able to track how expectations develop and see where the perceived experience concept changes over time. In other words, how different expectations are from actual experience. This study measures the service quality discrepancy resulting from the gap between expectations and experiences, as shown in the table below.

Table 6.11: Service Quality Gap

Category	Topic	Expectation	Perceive experience	P-E
1. Location	Geographic location	3.35	3.88	0.53
	Convenience of travel	3.53	3.88	0.35
	Safety	4.29	4.41	0.12
2. Quality of Teaching and Teaching Facilities	Quality of Teaching	4.35	3.12	-1.23
	Teaching Support Facilities	4.12	3.18	-0.94
3. Support Staff	Staff Service	3.82	4.12	0.3
4. Library, Computing and IT Facilities	Library	4.41	2.41	-2
	Computing and IT Facilities	4	3.29	-0.71
	Accommodation	4	3.82	-0.18
6. Social Life	Social Activities and Clubs	3	3.41	0.41
	Friends	3.77	3.24	-0.53
Overall Mean Score		3.88	3.52	-0.36

Source: Author

In the expectation phase, as can be seen in Table 6.11, the overall mean score was 3.88. This score represents moderate to high expectations of university services among the students. The highest expectation score was for the library, at 4.41. In contrast, the lowest expectation score related to social activities and clubs. The students acknowledged that many activities would be provided for them but they guessed that they would have to study hard and so would not be able to join the activities. The students also had high expectations of the teaching quality, giving it the second highest score (4.35) after the library.

Regarding perceptions of experience, it can be seen that the highest score related to safety. The score of 4.41 indicates that the students felt they were safe while studying at the university. Many students said that it was a very safe city because they did not have bad experiences while living there. On the other hand, the library took the lowest mark in terms of actual experiences. The score of 2.41 revealed low perceptions of the library because it failed to provide a new building, enough seating, and sufficient and updated resources. The overall mean score for perceptions of experiences was 3.52, showing that the students still had positive

perceptions within the six categories. In these six categories, the perception of location came out best because all three topics in this category (geographic location, convenience of travel and safety) had high perception scores.

As can be seen from Table 6.11, the average perceived service quality gap between expectations and experiences was -0.36, confirming that the university did not perform well in responding to the expectations of their students. However, as the gap score was less than one, this can be seen as a minor gap which does not greatly affect student satisfaction. The five topics which appear to show a positive gap are geographic location, convenience of travel, safety, staff service, and social activities and clubs. This indicates that the university performs well in these areas. In particular, in Table 6.11 the expectation mean score for support staff quality is 3.82, which indicates that students do not have too high expectations of staff service quality while studying overseas. The interview data showed that this was because of negative previous experiences with staff service in Thailand. After a nine-month period at the university, the average perception score in this category increased to more than 4. This meant that there was a high perception of the staff service they experienced exceeded what they were expecting by 0.3. Although this number change is not great, it is a positive signal that expectations based on negative previous experiences have been proven wrong.

The biggest discrepancy between expectations and experiences related to library quality of the score was -2, followed by the quality of teaching (-1.23), teaching support facilities (-0.94), and computing and IT facilities (-0.71). These results indicate that students were disappointed with these services and that disappointing performances occurred in six out of the eleven topics. It should be noted that, of these six factors, four are mainly related to academic services. Although accommodation quality and friends also saw problems, they had only slightly negative scores (-0.53 and -0.18 respectively) and, importantly, they were non-academic service factors. In other words, the students were less disappointed with non-academic factors than with topics related to academic service factors. However, it is interesting that in the experience of social life, where most students did not join the activities, their experience perception was still higher than their

expectations and there was a positive discrepancy score. This may be because the information on activities provided by the university shows willingness to support and care for its students, leading to a positive perception.

It is clear that the library shows the biggest discrepancy (-2) because it had the highest expectation score (4.41). After attending the university, the students' expectations were been changed as a result of it not providing what they expected (e.g. not enough seating, an old building, being under construction and insufficient books), leading to the lowest perceived experience score (2.41). As mentioned in the expectation phase, studying overseas is different from studying in Thailand. Overseas, students take responsibility for both attending lectures and carrying individual research using the library and other resources. Encountering an old, small library which lacks books and is under construction can cause a large gap between expectations and the experiences. Arambewela and Hall (2001, 2006), in research to determine international students' satisfaction in universities in the state of Victoria, Australia, analysed the gap between pre-choice expectation and post-choice perception and found that modern and adequate library facilities were important to student satisfaction. Wakefield and Blodgett (1994) support the notion that students spend a considerable proportion of their time in libraries; therefore, a lack of proper library facilities has a direct impact on their satisfaction levels.

The topic of safety, on the other hand, was an important issue in the expectation phase, receiving the third highest expectation score and creating an expectation of safety mean score of 4.29. At the end of the research, it had gained the highest perception score (4.41) (increased by 0.12). Therefore, it can be said that the students were satisfied with the level of safety while studying in this particular university and city. This is perhaps not surprising because the outcome confirms recommendations from friends and alumni that were passed to students before they came to the UK.

To provide more understanding of the discrepancy in the university's service quality, the categories have been ranked in order of the size of the discrepancy, going from the greatest to the smallest. This is shown in Table 6.12.

Table 6.12: Service Quality Ranking


Ranking	Categories
1	Library, Computing and IT
2	Quality of Teaching and Teaching Facilities
3	Accommodation
4	Social Life
5	Support Staff
6	Location

Source: Author

It is clear that there is a significant discrepancy between students' expectation and the perception of service quality they experienced as earlier presented in table 6.11. The three categories which have the biggest discrepancy are library, computing and IT; quality of teaching and teaching facilities; and accommodation while the three minimum gaps are social life; supporting staff and location.

The ranked ordering presented in Table 6.12, adding credence to the experience - expectation mean score. From the table, it can be seen that the most mismatched service quality area involves academic service factors such as library, computing and IT facilities (Rank 1) and quality of teaching and teaching facilities (Rank 2). On the other hand, it is interesting that non-academic categories such as location (Rank 6) and support staff services (Rank 5) exceeded students' expectations. Although accommodation and social life, which are ranked 3 and 4, have negative gap scores, their outstanding scores are very small. This may imply that there is not much dissatisfaction in these areas. The results of this study are somewhat consistent with a study by Hills (1995). Hills (1995) attempted to investigate the level of service quality in a UK university. Similarly to this study, Hills (1995) tracked the expectations and perceptions of students' experiences in the first lecture in each year of study over three years. He concluded that most mismatches between expectations and experiences related to academic factors such as course content, teaching quality, teaching methods, contact with academic staff and feedback, and that these decreased within those three years. On the other hand, non-academic factors such as careers, counselling and health, appeared higher than students' expectations (Hills, 1995). However, unlike this study, Hills (1995)

did not provide insight through details explaining how expectations changed over time and what factors determined students' perceptions of quality. Research carried out by Joseph and Joseph (1997) also found that students in New Zealand universities received a low level of service quality from universities in almost all areas, e.g. excellent instructors, academic facilities, reputation of the degree and accommodation. The only area in which New Zealand universities performed well was location, which was considered the least important factor for determining university service quality. Although our results support those of Hill (1995) and Joseph and Joseph (1997), they contrast with Arambewela et al., (2005). The study by Arambewela et al. (2005) reported that Asian students at five universities in the state of Victoria, Australia were satisfied with teaching quality and the quality of lecturers. In our interview results, the students were unhappy with teaching quality and their lecturers.

The results show that when students judge their perceptions of their experiences they weigh their perception based on their previous experiences and the information they have obtained. For example, the average experience perception score for teaching support facilities was 3.18, a decrease of 0.94 from the expectation score (4.12). One possible reason for the decrease is students making comparisons with their previous experience in Thailand. More than half of the students found that teaching support facilities in Thailand were equal to or higher than their UK counterparts. Although students also made comparisons with their previous university experience in Thailand in other areas, this was not as clear as it was for teaching support facilities.

A study by Russell (2005) on international students at a UK university revealed that international students had high expectations of receiving a better quality of education overseas and of having their qualifications recognised by companies in their home countries. This explains why international students have such high expectations of service quality they feel they should have in overseas institutes. Furthermore, according to Hill (1995), some undergraduate students' expectations are formed by their experiences at school, while the expectations of postgraduate students, on the other hand, are formed by their experiences at other higher

education organizations, as well as external communications such as university prospectuses, faculty brochures and leaflets. Willis and Kennedy (2004) highlighted major factors which assist in the formation of students' expectations, including university websites, exhibitions in students' home countries, educational agents, university brochures, and friends who are studying/living abroad. In our study, it appeared that students' expectations were formed according to information they obtain from a variety of sources and, in many cases the students received their information when the university promoted itself via the internet, prospectuses and brochures. Failure to deliver service quality as promised in promotional materials will be disappointing for students.

Higher education institutes should pay attention to the perceived quality of the university as seen by international students because many researchers have found that international students received information on universities from friends and families. If international students are not satisfied with the service quality when they return home, they will pass on their negative experiences to friends or family members who may be prospective students in the future (Lewins, 1990).

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has presented the results relating to Thai students' experiences of service quality at a provincial university. These results came from follow-up interviews with 17 students who had also taken part in the earlier phase. The results of that phase were presented in Chapter 5.

The aim of this chapter was to investigate students' perceptions of their university experiences and the degree of change between students' expectations and their perceived experiences. The results have been discussed and compared with previous studies from the literature.

The results showed that most of the students were very satisfied with their perceived experiences of safety and safety gained the highest perception score.

The students also had high perceptions of staff service as well as geographic location and the convenience of travelling to/from the city. Overall, it can be said that the case study university performed well in two categories: location and support staff. The library, on the other hand, was the factor with which there was most dissatisfaction from the students' point of view, followed by teaching support facilities and lecturers' teaching quality. Compared to the expectation phase, the outcomes indicated that the library was the most mismatched area in terms of the gap between students' expectations and perceptions of their actual experiences.

It was clear that the factors which had negative perceived quality of experiences were related to academic service factors such as lecturers' teaching, the library and teaching support facilities. Non-academic service factors such as location and service staff appeared to exceed students' expectations.

Chapter Seven

Quantitative Results

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, the second phase of interviewing investigating the expectations and experiences of seventeen Thai students in a university in the UK, and the gap between the two phases, was clarified. This chapter attempts to present the nationwide outcome of the quantitative approach to collecting data from Thai students in UK universities. In particular, the aim of this chapter is to fulfil three research objectives:

- Objective 2: To investigate factors relating to students' decision making regarding studying in the UK.
- Objective 3: To investigate the marketing the strategies of UK higher education used in Thailand.
- Objective 4: To investigate the role of education agency in Thailand and student satisfaction levels.

Although the in-depth interviews with seventeen students were focused on in relation to the decision-making process in the previous chapter (Chapter 5), this chapter will present some further factors involved in students' decision making processes, e.g. country characteristics, educational characteristics and university ranking. This is in an attempt to triangulate the results with those from the in-depth interviews. According to Creswell (1994), triangulation mixes the advantages of both qualitative and quantitative approaches, which provides better understanding of the concept being explored. Furthermore, the intense competition between education exporting countries forces higher education institutes to work harder in order to persuade prospective international students to come to their country. Different marketing strategies for each target market are needed in order for higher education institutes to retain their competitive advantages, especially in Asian countries, which comprise the main target market.

It is worth noting that the questionnaire survey was developed from the data collected from interviewing Thai students in four UK universities. The interviews provided the background information required to develop the questionnaire for this study. As stated in the methodology chapter, SPSS software was used to analyze the outcomes from 339 samples of Thai students in UK universities. The data was analysed using univariate, bivariate and multivariate methods.

This chapter begins with an outline of the demographic profile of the respondents. After that it will move on to the students' decision-making process. The UK's competitors, the characteristics of the country and its higher education, as well as university image, are discussed as factors influencing students' decisions. The next section focuses on marketing strategies and the present appropriate marketing mix used in the Thai market. The final section highlights the role of educational agencies as they relate to students and then focuses on how satisfied students are with them.

7.2 Demographic Profile

Table 7.1 provides a summary of the demographic profile of the sample. Out the sample of 339 respondents, there were 142 males (41.9%) and 197 females (58.1%). The majority of them were between 20-29 and 30-39 years of age (93.5%), while only 1.8 per cent were younger than 20 years old (6 respondents). Almost half of the sample came from Bangkok, which is the capital city of Thailand (47.8%), and the rest came from all parts of Thailand. The majority were undertaking doctoral degrees (54.6%), followed by master's degrees at 33.3 per cent and bachelor's degrees at 10.9 per cent.

It is clear that almost seventy per cent of the sample had work experience before coming to study in the UK. Regarding their length of stay, almost forty per cent of the sample had lived in the UK between six months and one year but only thirteen respondents (3.8%) had arrived less than six months ago. When asked whether

friends or family members had graduated from the UK, the majority (57.5%) indicated that they had.

Table 7.1: Demographic Profile

	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	142	41.9
	Female	197	58.1
Age	Less than 20	6	1.8
	20-29	192	56.6
	30-39	125	36.9
	40-49	16	4.7
Origin	Bangkok	162	47.8
	North	45	13.3
	Central	41	12.1
	Northeast	39	11.5
	East	14	4.1
	South	38	11.2
Work Experience	No	105	31
	Yes	234	69
Length in UK	Less than 6 months	13	3.8
	6 months -1 year	133	39.2
	Between 1-2 years	58	17.1
	Between 2-3 years	42	12.4
	More than 3 years	93	27.4
Friend or Family graduated in UK	No	144	42.5
	Yes	195	57.5
Current study	Bachelor's Degree	37	10.9
	Master's Degree	113	33.3
	Doctoral Degree	185	54.6
	Other	4	1.2
Financial Support	Parents	96	28.3
	Relatives	3	0.9
	Yourself	2	0.6
	The Royal Thai Government	227	67
	Private company	5	1.5
	Other	6	1.8

Source: Author

Financial support is another important issue for overseas students. A study by Merrick (2004) claimed that the vast majority of international students in her research (71%) paid their own fees. However, this is not the case for Thailand as this current study contrasts with Merrick's results. In this study's sample, the vast majority of Thai students (67%) were sponsored by the Royal Thai Government, followed by 28.3 per cent being funded by their parents and only 0.6 per cent (2

students) being self-funding. Although Merrick's sample (2004) was collected on a larger scale from 150 different nations, the term 'international students' in her study included students from many EU countries. EU students pay fees on the same basis as British students and this has perhaps caused the contradiction between the two studies.

7.3 Students' Decision Making

This section presents factors related to students' decision making. The factors included in this section relate to influential factors, country characteristics, UK higher education characteristics and university ranking. This section focuses on quantitative data based on the online survey, which by its nature was unable to give detailed insight into students' decision making. Thus, to overcome this barrier and achieve triangulation between methods, the discussion in this section will be complemented by the in-depth interviewing presented in the prior chapter (Chapter 5) in order to confirm the reliability of the study (Creswell, 1994).

7.3.1 Influential Factors for UK Education

The initial factors influencing Thai students to study in the UK are presented in Table 7.2. Students were asked to rate influential factors which motivated their interest in studying in the UK. In Table 7.2 the mean scores are illustrated, with 1 representing 'not at all', 2 representing 'slightly influenced' and 3 representing 'greatly influenced'. The survey results show that the students were highly influenced by themselves, followed by their family, with mean scores of 2.86 and 2.24 respectively. Influences from friends have a mean score of 1.91, which is lower than the influence from the government/private sponsors (2.01), alumni (1.93) and lecturers (1.92).

The two major influential factors, self and family, are in accordance with a study by Gray et al. (2003) in which students themselves and their parents has the greatest influence on students' choices of overseas tertiary institution in three Asian

countries. Additionally, this is a similar result to that of Pimpa (2003) in his research on the effect of family on Thai students' choices of international education. He found that Thai students obtained information from family members who had experienced studying in Australia regarding their intended country and city destination before making their decision. A further study by Pimpa (2004, 2005) added that Thai families influence their children in terms of finance, information, expectations, comparisons and persuasions.

Many studies in this area have found that the influence of friends is an important factor in students' overseas study decision making; for example, Maringe and Carter (2007), Pimpa (2001), Pimpa (2002b) and Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003). However, this may not be the case for Thailand because the results here show that friends have only minor influence (1.91) and have lower scores than family, sponsors, alumni and lecturers.

It is interesting that 227 respondents in the sample (67 per cent) were sponsored by the Royal Thai Government, as presented in the previous section (Table 7.1). However, the outcome in this section reveals that sponsor influence (2.01) is less important than self and family influences. This suggests that marketing activities employed by universities within the Thai market should primarily target students and their families because they are the main decision makers.

Table 7.2: Influential Factors for UK Education

Factors	N	Mean	S.D.
Self	336	2.86	0.385
Family	337	2.24	0.750
Government/Private Sponsor	335	2.01	0.862
Alumni	335	1.93	0.751
Lecturer	333	1.92	0.787
Friends	336	1.91	0.713
Agency	333	1.59	0.716
Other	50	1.48	0.814

Source: Author

7.3.2 UK Counterparts

An estimate from IDP (2002) states that the number of international students will reach 7.2 million by 2025; this is a dramatic increase from the 1.8 million in 2002. This growing number of international students suggests benefits to English-speaking countries because they are in the greatest demand by international students (Chen and Zimitat, 2006). Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) reported that the main competitor of the UK was the US, which 44 per cent of students listed as their first choice, followed by Australia (23 per cent), Canada (20 per cent) and other countries including European nations and Japan, which came in at 13 per cent. In 2010, the US was reported as having a 19 per cent market share of foreign students, followed by the UK (11%), Germany (8%), France (7%) and Australia (6%) (UIS, 2012a).

In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to indicate which countries they had considered and to rate the level of consideration, with 1 meaning 'Not at all', 2 meaning 'Slightly considered' and 3 meaning 'Highly considered'.

In Table 7.3, the output shows that 83.8 per cent of the sample had considered other countries before their final decision, while 16.2 per cent had never considered countries other than the UK. The US was the most-considered country in the sample as it reached the highest mean score of 2.68 out of 3. After the US, Australia and 'Other' came in with a mean score of 2.03, which was close to 'slightly considered'. The category of 'Other' included both European nations and Asian countries, e.g. France, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Singapore and Malaysia. On the other hand, New Zealand, Canada, Germany and Italy were not much considered by students and these countries had a mean score of less than 1.50. These confirm that, to maximise their choice, students are likely to gather information from other countries and consider alternatives before making the final decision for the UK. The consumer decision process starts when a consumer recognizes a problem and finishes after purchase and post-purchase evaluation (Moogan et al., 1999). Before making a purchase, a consumer may take time to search for information and evaluate a variety of alternatives. The selection

of a country is equivalent to ‘the evaluation of alternatives’ in the consumer buying decision process model (Moogan et al., 1999). Additionally, according to the statistics of the Atlas of Student Mobility (2011) and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS, 2012a), the first five countries in the list of main global destinations for international students at tertiary level in 2010 were the United States , the United Kingdom , Germany , France and Australia. The outcome of this study confirms a similar result in that the US and Australia remain the top competitors in the Thai market. However, the result reveals that Germany may fall short in terms of competitive intelligence for higher education in the Thai market even though it takes the third-biggest share in the global market.

Table 7.3: The UK’s Competitors

Considered other countries	Yes or No	N	Percent
	Yes	284	83.8
	No	55	16.2
Countries	N	Mean	S.D.
US	281	2.68	0.60
Australia	278	2.03	0.83
Other	74	2.03	0.88
Canada	271	1.49	0.69
New Zealand	270	1.39	0.62
Germany	273	1.39	0.65
Italy	269	1.10	0.32

Source: Author

7.3.3 Country/Higher Education Characteristics and University Image

This section aims to identify the effect of country/higher education characteristics and university ranking on students’ decision making about UK higher education. Generally speaking, this section attempts to answer the second objective of the research. The respondents were asked to state how much they agreed with statements on aspects of the country and education characteristics of the UK, as well assessing the effect of university image on their decision making. The mean scores from these questions are based on a five-point Likert scale where 1 represents ‘strongly disagree’ and 5 represents ‘strongly agree’.

Table 7.4 summarizes the results relating to country and higher education characteristics. Initially, the statement ‘*high image and prestige in Thailand*’ reached the highest mean score of 4.23, which is close to ‘slightly agree’. Students

also showed slight agreement with the statement '*Quality of British transport*' (mean 3.76), '*Safety*' (mean 3.72), '*Ease of going to European countries*' (mean 3.59) and '*Others*' (mean 3.59). On the other hand, the results for the rest of the statements were mainly neutral and the two statements '*Cost of living*' and '*British sport*' received the lowest mean score among the country characteristics (means of 2.68 and 2.67 respectively).

Table 7.4 Country/Education Characteristics

Country Characteristics	N	Mean	S.D.
High image and prestige in Thailand	337	4.23	0.884
Quality of British transport	335	3.76	1.092
Safety	334	3.72	1.025
Ease of going to European countries	336	3.59	1.151
Others	41	3.59	1.612
Beautiful town, city, country	336	3.38	1.015
English culture and arts	336	3.33	1.104
Multiculturalism	335	3.04	1.084
History of country	336	2.91	1.100
Cost of living	334	2.68	1.115
British sport (such as football)	336	2.67	1.241
Education Characteristics			
The length of the course	338	4.43	0.795
Recognition of qualification in Thailand	337	4.41	0.726
University reputation	338	4.33	0.737
Quality of education	338	4.32	0.754
Quality of facilities for students	336	3.70	0.896
No GMAT requirement	337	3.69	1.326
Graduate/alumni reputation	338	3.63	1.032
Variety of courses provided	336	3.58	0.971
Others	27	3.41	1.670
Tuition fees/cost of study	337	2.87	1.022
University Image			
Faculty/department/school image affected your decision to study at a UK university	339	4.19	0.814
University image affected your decision to study at a UK university	339	4.06	0.806
University image had a greater effect than faculty/department/school image on your decision to study at a UK university	339	3.40	1.095

Source: Author

It can be extracted from the country characteristics results that the high image and prestige of British education in Thailand was the most important aspect for students' decision making, followed by the quality of British transport, safety issues

and the opportunity to visit European countries. In particular, the ease with which European countries could be visited was perhaps one of the most attractive factors because the main competitors, such as the US or Australia, could not offer this. Other factors such as the history of Britain, sport (football and others) and the cost of living were less-considered. In the case of the cost of living, the UK is regarded as one of the most expensive countries (Lawley and Perry, 1998; Verbik and Lasanowski, 2007). A study by Merrick (2004) on international students in UK universities found that almost twenty five per cent of the respondents reported having financial hardship, especially students who came from sub-Saharan Africa or North America, and the main reason cited for this hardship was the high cost of living. Altbach (1991) states that the cost of education, which includes the cost of living, is one of the major variables that international students take into consideration when choosing countries and institutions. However, the results in Table 7.4 indicate that cost of living was the second-least considered aspect. This is perhaps due to the fact that 67 per cent of the respondents had scholarships and monthly expenses paid by the Royal Thai Government.

Question 14 in the questionnaire asked respondents about their level of agreement in terms of those UK higher education characteristics which made them select this country as their final destination. The scaling in this question followed the same pattern as in question 13.

As can be seen in Table 7.4, there are four statements that have mean scores higher than 4: '*the length of the course*' (4.43), '*recognition of qualifications in Thailand*' (4.41), '*university reputation*' (4.33) and '*quality of education*' (4.32). This indicates that these statements are seen by students as the most important educational characteristics in relation to studying in the UK. In particular, course duration in most UK universities is shorter than elsewhere; for example, one year for a master's degree in the UK (Lawley and Perry, 1998) but more than 1 year for a master's degree in Australia (University of Technology Sydney, 2012 and University of Sydney, 2012). Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) also confirm that master's degrees in the US take two years. Back et al. (1997) support the idea that programme length is an important factor for international students when

making a decision about studying abroad because it has a direct impact on the total costs they must invest in their overseas education.

Many researchers claim that the main reason why international students study in the UK is its educational quality and/or standards (e.g. *Times Higher Education*, 2010b; Merrick and Robinson, 2006; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Lawley and Perry, 1998). The high reputation of British universities has been mentioned as an important reason for international students to study in the UK and it can be argued that UK universities offer excellent value for overseas students (Kinnell, 1989). However, the outcomes in our current study are not consistent with these researchers because our results show that the course length and qualification recognition in Thailand are the main reasons. The interview results in the Chapter 5 found that eleven respondents out of the seventeen students decided to study at a UK university because the course was shorter than in other countries.

Students also agreed with statements related to facilities (mean 3.70), entry requirements (mean 3.69), alumni reputation (mean 3.63) and the courses provided (3.58). Tuition fees took the lowest mean score of 2.87, meaning that this factor will have the least amount of impact on students' decision. In other words, it can be concluded that the Thai students were not greatly concerned about the study costs or tuition fees when deciding on studying in the UK. This result is in contrast with the study of Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003), which claims that the pricing variable is one of the most important in attracting international students. On this basis, they claim that the best way to attract more international students into UK higher education is to lower tuition fees.

The next set of questions sought to identify whether university or school image had any impact on students' deciding to study in the UK. Chapleo (2007) claims that one of the barriers to successfully building a university's brand concerns imbalances between school and university brands. If a school brand has a higher profile on its own than the university brand, the university brand will be left behind (Chapleo, 2007). This can be the case when students look at rankings which consider both whole universities and individual faculties. International students

have to consider which should be the most appropriate indicator for them before making a decision. Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007) add that UK universities should harmonize their school and university brands in order that the university's overall brand will penetrate more effectively into the competition in international market. They claim that "without brand harmonization, any one School in the University, or the University itself could potentially damage the brand image of the whole" (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007: 946). In particular, they suggest that UK universities should work together with the British Council to promote UK universities as a whole, for example via the statement "Britain provides the best education in the world" (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007: 946).

The results are presented in Table 7.4. The most agreed-with statement is '*Faculty/department/school image affected your decision to study at a UK university*', with a mean score of 4.19. Second is the statement: '*University image affected your decision to study at a UK university*', with a slightly lower mean score than the first one (4.06). This can be interpreted as meaning that students see faculty image as stronger impact than university image. In other words, students are likely to decide on a particular university because of its faculty's image rather than the university image. This can be proved by the final statement: '*University image has a greater effect than faculty/department/school image on your decision to study at a UK university*', representing neutral agreement with the mean score of 3.40. When comparing the results with those of Chapleo (2007) and Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana (2007), it can be seen that alignment between school/faculty image and university image in the Thai market is lagging behind these two authors' suggestions.

Table 7.5 and Table 7.6 present additional data for further investigation. These show differences in country characteristics and education characteristics across four educational levels. The Kruskal-Wallis test has been employed to show the statistic significance of the data. Kruskal-Wallis is a non-parametric test used to compare the scores on a continuous variable for three or more groups (Pallant,

2007). It is an alternative to one-way between-groups (ANOVA) parametric tests that scores ranks and mean ranks for each group (Pallant, 2007).

Table 7.5 : Differences in Country Characteristics across Educational Level

Country Characteristics	N	Mean Rank	Chi square	d.f.	Asymp. Sig.
Cost of living					
Bachelor's degree	37	160.97	20.320	3	.000
Master's degree	113	199.42			
Ph.D.	185	149.76			
Others	4	136.88			
High image and prestige					
Bachelor's degree	37	170.65	12.852	3	0.005
Master's degree	113	192.89			
Ph.D.	185	154.42			
Others	4	155.50			
Beautiful town, city ,and country					
Bachelor's degree	37	193.92	10.803	3	0.013
Master's degree	113	183.44			
Ph.D.	185	153.60			
Others	4	196.88			
Multiculturalism					
Bachelor's degree	37	205.50	7.984	3	0.046
Master's degree	113	169.27			
Ph.D.	185	159.05			
Others	4	192.50			

Source: Author

In Table 7.5, the Kruskal-Wallis test reports on whether there are differences in the decisions to study in the UK, with regard to country characteristics, among the four educational levels. While there are no differences among the four groups for the majority of the country characteristics, four of these characteristics show significant values of less than 0.05. Table 7.5 only shows the results for statistically significant attributes in order to conserve space. The test confirmed that '*cost of living*' ($p = 0.000$), '*high image and prestige*' ($p = 0.005$), '*beautiful town, city and country*' ($p = 0.013$) and '*multiculturalism*' ($p = 0.046$) significantly affected the decision to study in the UK among the four groups. Master's degree students gave the highest mean rank to '*cost of living*' (199.42) and '*high image and prestige*' (192.89), which means that UK living costs in the UK and the high image and prestige of UK education have the highest impacts on this group's decision making. On the other

hand, bachelor's degree students tend to show more interest in the '*multiculturalism*' of the UK than the other groups. Students in the category of 'others', representing courses such as diplomas, are likely to decide to study in the UK because of '*beautiful town, city and country*', as shown by this having the highest mean rank compared with the other groups.

Table 7.6: Differences in Education Characteristics across Different Educational Level

Education Characteristics	N	Mean Rank	Chi square	d.f.	Asymp Sig
Tuition fees/cost of study					
Bachelor's degree	37	165.78	29.809	3	0.000
Master's degree	113	206.89			
Ph.D.	185	146.68			
Others	4	154.25			
No GMAT requirement					
Bachelor's degree	37	111.35	16.751	3	0.001
Master's degree	113	184.19			
Ph.D.	185	170.72			
Others	4	183.00			
The length of the course					
Bachelor's degree	37	121.32	14.421	3	0.002
Master's degree	113	181.40			
Ph.D.	185	171.20			
Others	4	203.25			
Variety of courses provided					
Bachelor's degree	37	165.04	12.405	3	0.006
Master's degree	113	191.95			
Ph.D.	185	154.19			
Others	4	207.88			

Source: Author

The analysis of the Kruskal-Wallis test presented in Table 7.6 aims to show whether there are any differences in terms of education characteristics across the four education levels. The outcome indicates that there are statistically significant differences in four education characteristics among the groups, while the majority of characteristics do not differ across educational levels. The first four characteristics, which have significant values of less than 0.05, are '*tuition fees*' ($p = 0.000$), '*No GMAT requirement*' ($p = 0.001$), '*the length of the course*' ($p = 0.002$), and '*variety of courses provided*' ($p = 0.006$). Table 7.6 presents only statistically significant characteristics to conserve space. Students who come for a master's

degree are likely to pay attention to not needing GMAT in the UK and the cost of tuition fees, as shown by these having the highest mean rank compared to the other groups. On the other hand, students in the category of 'others' have the highest mean rank for the length of the course and the variety of courses provided by the university. In other words, they prefer to use course duration and availability as important factors in their decision making compared to other groups of students.

7.3.4 University Ranking

The rise and importance of university ranking has become a significant issue in higher education. There is evidence that major university ranking systems such as the *Times Higher Education Supplement (THES)* and *Shanghai Jiao Tong* are having a deep impact on universities (Fahey, 2007). They especially impact on international students' university choices because students use university rankings to create a shortlist (Federkeil, 2002; Hazelkorn, 2008). Most university rankings also suggest that they are designed not only to inform students' choices but also to rank all the programmes of each university (Dill, 2006).

This section seeks to indicate the effect of university ranking in relation to decision making about selecting a UK university and the impact ranking has on university image. Table 7.7 presents data in terms of mean scores and standard deviations in which the respondents rated items according to a five-point Likert scale.

The data show that only 1.5 per cent (5) of the respondents had never heard of university ranking, while 98.5 per cent, or 334 students, had heard of it. This result confirms that university ranking, which is sometimes referred to as 'league tables', may be a significant impact factor for international students, as commented on by Hazelkorn (2008).

The next set of questions attempted to clarify whether UK university rankings had any influence on students' decision making. Two statements on university ranking

were used. For the first statement, '*UK university ranking influences Thai students' decision to study at a UK university*', the mean score in Table 7.7 indicates that UK university ranking is an influential factor because it gained an agreement score greater than 4 (mean = 4.19). However, the second statement, '*UK university ranking is the main factor that influences Thai students' decision to study at a UK university*', gained a mean score of 3.87. This score is close to slight agreement but is lower than the first statement; therefore, it can be interpreted that students agree that UK university ranking influences their decision making but the effect is not strong enough to conclude that it is the main factor influencing them. A US study reported that only 11 per cent of its sample agreed that ranking was very important to their choice of school, whereas 60 per cent of respondents indicated that it was not important (McDonough et al., 1998). The result in this current study may contradict McDonough et al. (1998). However, other researchers have reported positive results for university ranking influences on students' decision choices in other countries, e.g. Federkeil (2002) and Federkeil (2009) of Germany. Federkeil (2002) found that 50 per cent of engineering students selected a university through consulting university rankings (CHE ranking). In the UK, Robert and Thompson (2007 cited in Hazelkorn, 2008) state that more than 90% of international students agree that UK league tables are important/very important in informing their choices of institutes. Furthermore, the interview results on student expectations in Chapter 5 (Section 5.3.2) verify the findings here in that fourteen out of seventeen students mentioned that they consulted university rankings in order to apply for universities according to their rankings. Students particularly got their information from the *Times Higher Education*. Specifically, a female student said that her sponsor sent her the list of university rankings from the *Times* in order that she would select a UK university ranked within the top 20 (R16, business student). This evidence supports the results of the author's study.

The next set of questions attempted to understand the sources of the university rankings these students obtained. The outcome in Table 7.7 reveals that '*WWW/internet*' was the most important to students, with a mean score of 4.04. This result is in line with the results from the interviews in the expectation phase (Chapter 5) in that these revealed that students searched for information on

universities in general on the internet before they decided to come to the UK. ‘*The British Council*’ was the second most-important source of university ranking with a mean score of 3.66, while ‘*UK university prospectuses*’ had a mean score of 3.45 and was the third most-important source. ‘*Alumni*’ (3.36), ‘*Friends*’ (3.20), ‘*Private Educational Agencies*’ (3.17) and ‘*UK university road shows*’ (3.14) had low scores which showed they were neutral in the minds of the respondents.

Table 7.7: University Ranking

	Yes/No	N	Percentage
Have you heard of university ranking?	Yes	334	98.5
	No	5	1.5
University Ranking	N	Mean	S.D.
UK university ranking influences Thai students’ decision to study at a UK university	332	4.19	0.762
UK university ranking is the main factor that influences Thai students’ decision to study at a UK university	332	3.87	0.917
Source of University Ranking	N	Mean	S.D.
WWW/internet	331	4.04	0.815
British Council	327	3.66	0.932
UK university prospectuses	327	3.45	0.884
UK graduates/alumni	327	3.36	0.909
Friends	326	3.20	0.938
Private Educational Agencies	327	3.17	0.992
UK university road shows in Thai high schools/universities	326	3.14	0.952
Other	21	2.76	1.446
Effect of University Ranking on University Image	N	Mean	S.D.
University reputation	332	4.33	0.686
Quality of education	331	4.08	0.801
Quality of research	329	3.99	0.839
University status	330	3.88	0.758
Quality of graduates	331	3.79	0.880
Job prospects	332	3.74	0.888
Educational facilities	331	3.72	0.837
Other	14	2.79	1.251

Source: Author

The final question in this section asked for the respondents’ levels of agreement about whether university ranking affects aspects of university image. As can be seen in Table 7.7, all the aspects had high mean values apart from ‘*others*’. The outcomes indicate that ‘*University reputation*’, which has a mean score of 4.33, had

the highest level of agreement from the respondents, followed by '*Quality of education*' (mean 4.08) and then '*Quality of research*' (mean 3.99). The other aspects, such as '*University status*', '*Quality of graduates*', '*Job prospects*' and '*Educational facilities*', also had mean scores close to 4, which indicate high agreement from students.

Based on the literature review, it can be seen that university reputation, educational quality and quality of research are the main criteria or indicators for both the Jiao Thong ranking and the *Times Higher Education Ranking (THES)*. In the Jiao Thong ranking, '*quality of education*' accounts for 10% while 'quality of faculty' and 'research output', based on the research performance of both alumni and staff, account for 80% of the total score (Liu et al., 2005). In the *Times Higher Education Ranking (THES)*, the reputation of a university, which comes from the 'peer review' and 'global employer' indicators, accounts for 50 per cent of the total ranking score (Federkeil, 2009). These results suggest that if a particular university performs well in terms of reputation, educational quality and research quality it will improve its ranking. Therefore, a positive relationship has been created between university ranking and university reputation, educational quality and research quality. Federkeil (2009: 19) also claims that "One of the most important effects of rankings is their impact on the reputation of institutions, both at national and international level", and this is how rankings have a strong impact on institutions' image. Additionally, based on the results of an international survey of higher education leaders and senior managers from 41 countries, it is concluded that a strong belief has been found among university leaders that not only do rankings help to maintain and build institutional positions and reputations but they also help increase the number of student applications if rankings are improved (Hazelkorn, 2008). The results in this current study are thus supported by these researchers.

7.4 Marketing Strategies

Since there are growing numbers of international students moving overseas for their education, the competition between higher education institutes among major education exporter nations has become intense. Different marketing strategies are used to persuade prospective international students. This section presents the data on the marketing materials and strategies that the Thai students experienced when they applied to a UK university. In other words, this section researches the third objective of the study.

7.4.1 Marketing Material

As can be seen from table 7.8, the category of '*other*' and '*WWW/Internet*' were the two strongest marketing source influencing students to apply UK universities with the similar score (3.64 and 3.62 respectively). Although the score of '*other*' (3.64) was a little higher than '*WWW/Internet*' (3.62), it came from the view of 39 respondents whereas '*WWW/Internet*' came from 323 students. This means that the general agreement of more students was on the category of '*WWW/Internet*'. A previous study of university promotional communication media aimed at international students in three Asian countries (Malaysia, Hong Kong and Singapore) concluded that the World Wide Web (WWW) was perceived as the most important sources of marketing material for universities in all three countries (Gray et al., 2003). Therefore our results support those of Grey et al., (2003). It was found that what students regarded as '*other*' included professors' or supervisors' reputations and expertise, sponsors' opinions of reputations, connections with prospective supervisors etc. These results can be seen as meaning that although the students received information from marketing materials or people before they applied to a UK university, their final decision relied strongly on prospective supervisors. This may be because more than fifty per cent of the respondents were Ph.D. students, who are more dependent on individual supervision.

'*University prospectuses*' were the third most-important marketing sources, with mean scores of 3.28. In contrast, '*the British Council*' (mean = 2.73) and '*Private*

educational agencies' (mean 2.72) were the least influential marketing materials. '*Personal recommendations*' from people such as Thai lecturers and '*Friends*' were perceived as neutral by the students (3.15 and 2.93, respectively). Pimpa (2001, 2002a, 2002b) found that recommendations from friends were regarded as a non-familial referent that influenced Thai students in Australia to study overseas. Additionally, in Chapter 5 of this thesis (section 5.3.2) recommendations from lecturers in Thai universities were found to be a significant reason for students making a decision to choose a university in the UK. Hence, the quantitative approach results confirm the qualitative results.

Table 7.8: Marketing Materials/Influencers for Deciding to Study in the UK

Marketing materials/influencers	N	Mean	S.D.
Other	39	3.64	1.597
WWW/Internet	323	3.62	0.997
University prospectuses	322	3.28	1.018
UK graduates/alumni	321	3.17	1.157
Personal recommendations (such as from Thai lecturers, colleagues)	322	3.15	1.259
Friends	321	2.93	1.106
Educational fairs	322	2.83	1.064
UK university road shows in Thai high schools/universities	323	2.79	1.124
British Council	322	2.73	1.143
Private educational agencies	323	2.72	1.261

Source: Author

Furthermore, in 2006 the British government launched PMI2, which is a scheme aiming to attract an additional 100,000 international students over the next five years. The hope is to secure a leading position in the international education market and to establish partnerships with universities overseas (American Council on Education, 2006; British Council, 2010a). In this scheme, the British Council is assigned to promote UK higher education and to increase the number of international students in the UK as one of its main priorities (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007). The results in Table 7.8 may be a significant indication that the British Council's efforts to promote UK higher education in Thailand may not be successful as it got the second-lowest mean score. Private educational agencies received the lowest mean score,

indicating that they also do not have a sufficient effect on influencing students to apply for UK higher education. Nevertheless, the role of educational agencies and students' attitudes to them will be explained in Section 7.5.

7.4.2 Marketing Strategies

As the second market leader after the US, the UK has eleven per cent of the market share of international students (UIS, 2012a). In 2011-12, 435,230 international students were reported to be studying in the UK's higher education institutes (UKCISA, 2013). However, the rise of competitors in the market, from both English-speaking countries and non-English speaking countries, is forcing UK universities to equip themselves with more marketing strategies in order to leverage their market position. This section investigates 24 marketing strategies that UK universities have applied to the Thai market. These strategies were drawn out of the data from the interviews with Thai students from four UK universities. The respondents rated their levels of agreement with each statement on a 5 point-Likert scale in which, for example, 1 represented 'Strongly Disagree', 3 represented 'Neither Agree nor Disagree' and 5 showed strong agreement.

Table 7.9 shows a summary of the output. As can be seen from the table, two statements share the highest mean score. The first is '*The university is in a safe area*' and the other is '*The academic staff has good qualifications*'. Their mean scores of 4.18 mean that students regard safety and staff qualifications to be the strongest marketing aspects for universities promoting themselves in the Thai market. The second strongest marketing aspects is shown by the statement '*The university has a good atmosphere in which to study*', with the mean score of 4.14. The third-strongest aspect of marketing, which has a slightly lower score than the second one, is '*The university has a high standard of quality*', with a mean score of 4.05.

Table 7.9: Marketing Aspects Agreement in Thai Market

Marketing Aspects	N	Mean	S.D.
The university is in a safe area.	325	4.18	0.797
The academic staff has good qualifications.	325	4.18	0.780
The university has a good atmosphere in which to study	325	4.14	0.781
The university has a high standard of quality	325	4.05	0.769
The transportation to the university is convenient	325	4.02	0.768
The course is designed to be in line with the needs of graduates/workplaces	325	4.02	0.866
The duration of the course is appropriate	325	4.02	0.839
The academic staff communicate well with students and are easy to access	325	4.00	0.887
The university has good facilities	325	4.00	0.843
The university is in a good location	325	3.89	0.887
The university is very supportive of students	325	3.87	0.905
The course is very concentrated	325	3.86	0.824
The university offers a variety of courses	325	3.82	0.804
The university focuses on student satisfaction	325	3.78	0.924
The class size is appropriate.	325	3.71	0.914
The university uses university ranking to promote itself	325	3.64	0.916
The town of my university is beautiful	325	3.60	0.978
The tuition is of the same standard as other universities in the UK	325	3.52	0.815
The university usually promotes itself via an educational fairs	325	3.32	0.888
The tuition fees are reasonable	325	3.27	1.060
The university sends staff overseas to promote itself in Thailand	325	3.24	1.018
The university promotes itself via educational agencies	325	3.21	1.082
The university promotes itself via the British Council	325	3.08	0.991
The tuition fees are similar to those in other countries	325	3.06	0.973

Source: Author

The safety issue does not only arise in the marketing activities of UK universities; rather, it is also found in students' decision-making factors. Arambewela (2003), Arambewela and Hall (2009) claim that safety is one of the major considerations of international students and their families when making a decision to undertake

education in a foreign country. Therefore, the safety issue is an important influencing factor in decision-making processes and marketing strategies. Additionally, the results for the qualifications of academic staff (mean = 4.18) and a high standard of quality in the university (mean = 4.05) agree with the British Council's Students Decision Making Survey, suggesting that international students choose to study in the UK because of the quality of the education (*Times Higher Education*, 2010b).

However, the outcomes also indicate that students agree least with the statements '*The university promotes itself via the British Council*' (mean = 3.08) and '*The tuition fees are similar to those in other countries*' (mean = 3.06). Additionally, not only the last two statements in the table but all of the last seven statements are related to promotional strategies and the cost of studying in the UK. For example, three are related to tuition fees and four are aspects of promotional strategies.

This can be interpreted as meaning that the marketing aspects which are most effective for the Thai market are those related to the quality of education, safety, location, facilities, courses, duration of courses and staff, as these aspects have mean scores of 4 and above. Course duration was regarded as the most important reason why Thai students chose the UK in the qualitative phase in Chapter 5 and was also an important educational characteristic in the previous section (Section 7.3.3). On the other hand, the output proves that marketing aspects such as promotional strategies via sending staff overseas, educational agencies and the British Council may not be effective. Moreover, marketing using pricing may not be a good approach to marketing UK higher education in Thailand. Many existing studies have found that studying in the UK is expensive (e.g. Kinnell, 1989; Lawley and Perry, 1998; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; *Education Travel Magazine*, 2005; Curtis, 2005; *Independent*, 2008; Li et al., 2009). Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) suggest that the best way to persuade more international students into the UK is to concentrate on lowering tuition fees and providing more scholarships for international students.

However, having 24 attributes makes it difficult to interpret the output and the meaning of the data. Given this, a more complex technique, factor analysis, is introduced in the section. Factor analysis is used to reduce the number of attributes so that there are fewer variables and a more manageable set.

7.4.3 Factor Analysis

These 24 statements fit with the 4Ps marketing mix: product, price, place and promotion, as described by Kotler and Fox (1995). Kinnell (1989) also suggests that the traditional 4Ps are appropriate for the needs of educational institutes. The use of the 4Ps in higher education was found in previous literature by Kinnell (1989) and Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003). These statements can also fit with the 7Ps mix concept, which is an extension of the 4Ps framework by Booms and Bitner (1981). The 7Ps mix takes account of the intangible nature of services, resulting in the addition of people, physical evidence and process to the traditional marketing mix.

Some researchers (e.g. Ivy, 2008) have applied the concept of the service marketing mix (7Ps) to research into the marketing mix in higher education. Ivy, in particular, looked at whether the service marketing mix was appropriate for an MBA programme in South Africa. He found that neither the traditional 4Ps nor the 7Ps were appropriate. Therefore, he developed four new distinctive elements (programme, prominence, prospectus and premium) alongside the three traditional service marketing mix elements (price, people and promotion) as a new marketing mix based on MBA students' opinions (Ivy, 2008). Our current study also purposes to determine whether the traditional marketing mix has been appropriately applied in marketing in Thailand.

As mentioned above, factor analysis is a statistical technique used to reduce factors from a larger number of variables to a smaller number, creating a more manageable set of information (Zikmund, 2009; Wheeler, Shaw and Bar, 2004). Through factor analysis, efforts are made to group or segment the plethora

marketing strategy attributes used in Thailand into groups which facilitate easier understanding and more manageable explanations.

The initial step in factor analysis is to develop a correlation matrix. This step confirms the strength of correlations among attributes and shows whether a factor analysis is worthwhile (Pallant, 2007; Bryman and Cramer, 2011). Pallant (2007) suggests using two statistical measurement tests: Bartlett's test and the Kyser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy. In this case, the KMO result is 0.901 and the Bartlett's test result is 0.000 (Table 7.10). According to Pallant (2007), if the KMO result is greater than 0.6 and Bartlett's test is significant ($p < 0.05$), it is appropriate to use factor analysis. In addition, to meet concerns about the reliability of the factors emerging for factor analysis, a sample size of more than 150 cases is recommended (Pallant, 2007), while Tabachnick and Fidell (2007) also suggest having at least 300 cases for factor analysis. Therefore, the sample size of this study, which comprises 339 respondents, makes it appropriate to proceed with this approach.

Table 7.10: KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO	0.901		
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Chi-Square	df	Sig.
	4405.384	276	.000

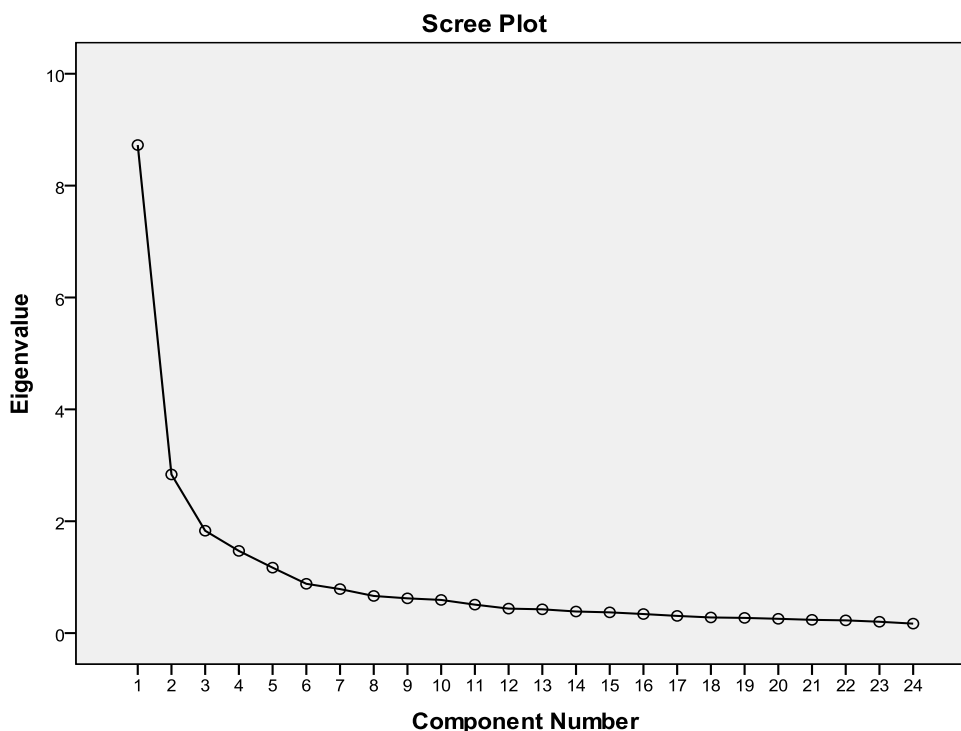
Source: Author

The next step is to determine how many factors should be used to represent the interrelation among the set of attributes. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the two most widely used approaches for extraction techniques are principal components analysis (PCA) and factor analysis (FA) (Bryman and Cramer, 2005). Principal component analysis (PCA) is applied to this study because primary concern in is data reduction (Pallant, 2007; Mooi and Sarstedt, 2011). Kaiser's criterion and a scree test are employed to assist with deciding the minimum number of factors to retain. Kaiser's criterion functions to keep factors which have

eigenvalue of greater than 1. A scree plot is a plotted graph where points which lie before the shape of curve changes direction and becomes horizontal are retained (Pallant 2007). In this particular case, after Kaiser's criterion had been applied five factors were extracted (variance accounted for 8.726, 2.836, 1.830, 1.469 and 1.170). These five components have a total variance of 66.796%.

However, in the scree plot, the graph changed at six factors. This indicated that four or five factors, the data points above the break, should be retained. However, the researcher tried to extract the fourth and fifth factors but no rational interpretation of the factors could be made. In other words, the factors could not be explained and named logically because some factors had less than three items, suggesting they were not the best fit to the data (Pallant, 2007). Therefore, the researcher decided to retain those three factors which represented the best fit to the data for factor analysis.

Figure 7.1: Scree Plot



Source: Author

After the number of factors has been determined in a factor analysis, they are rotated in order to increase the interpretability of these factors. As mentioned in the methodology chapter (see Section 3.4.2.5), orthogonal rotation seeks to produce factors which are unrelated to or independent of one another, while oblique rotation produces factors which are correlated (Bryman and Cramer, 2011; Ferguson and Cox, 1993). Although both orthogonal and oblique rotation have been employed in this current study in an attempt to obtain the clearest and easiest to interpret results, the results of the orthogonal rotation (Varimax) are shown in Table 7.11 because they provide better interpretation as only factor loadings greater than 0.4 are presented.

After rotation, the researcher needs to label or name the factors, as factor analysis does not assign meaning to the factors (Stapleton, 1997). This is because the goal of factor analysis is to summarize a set of variables; hence, the stage of labelling or naming factors is important. Naming the factors should represent aggregates of variables under the same factor (Stapleton, 1997). However, naming the factors appears to be highly subjective. In reality, different researchers may assign different names to the same factor because of their individual backgrounds and experiences; therefore, the process of naming factors is subject to the subjective opinions of each researcher (Hair et al., 1998). A common rule used to reduce subjectivity, suggested by Ford, MacCallum and Tait (1986: 296), is that “only variables with loadings greater than 0.4 on factor should be considered ‘significant’ and used in defining that factor”. Another factor naming technique, which this research employs, is to use the highest loading variable in the factor because the higher factor loading, the greater influence in the selection of the factor name. (Hair et al., 1998; Ivy, 2008).

A summary of the rotated factors is given in Table 7.11. The three-factor solution explains a total of 55.8 per cent of the variance, with component 1 contributing 26.32 per cent, component 2 contributing 14.93 per cent and component 3 contributing 14.54 per cent. The names of the factor are based on appropriate variables represented in the factor and the selection of factor names was

influenced more by the highest loading variable in the factor than the lower loading variables (Ivy, 2008).

Table 7.11: Factor Analysis Results (Varimax Rotation)

Components/Factors	1	2	3
Product and People			
The university is very supportive of students	0.745		
The university has a high standard of quality	0.723		
The course is very concentrated	0.718		
The academic staff communicate well with students and are easy to access	0.712		
The university focuses on student satisfaction	0.707		
The academic staff have good qualifications	0.683		
The university has good facilities	0.682		
The class size is appropriate	0.668		
The tuition fees are reasonable	0.658		
The course is designed to be in line with the needs of graduates/workplaces	0.658		
The duration of the course is appropriate	0.628		
The tuition fees are similar to those in other countries	0.535		
The university offers a variety of courses	0.475		
Promotion			
The university promotes itself via educational agencies		0.850	
The university sends staff overseas to promote itself in Thailand		0.824	
The university promotes itself via the British Council		0.757	
The university usually goes promotes itself via an educational fairs		0.732	
The university uses university ranking to promote itself		0.549	
The tuition is of the same standard as other universities in the UK		0.436	
Place			
The university has a good atmosphere in which to study			0.787
The transportation to the university is convenient			0.767
The university is in a good location			0.766
The university is in a safe area			0.743
The town of my university is beautiful			0.543
Eigen Value	8.726	2.836	1.830
% of common variance	26.328	14.933	14.537
% of cumulative variance	26.328	41.261	55.798

Source: Author

Product and People

In the first factor, product and people is made up of 13 marketing strategy attributes. As it accounted for 26.32 per cent of the total variance explained by all factors, it is the most significant component for a marketing strategy. It comprises attributes related to products of the university such as '*The university has a high standard of quality*' (loading = 0.723), '*The course is very concentrated*' (loading = 0.718), '*The university focuses on student satisfaction*' (loading = 0.707), '*The university has good facilities*' (loading = 0.682), '*The class size is appropriate*' (loading = 0.668), '*The course is designed to be in line with the need of graduates/workplaces*' (loading = 0.658), and '*the duration of course is appropriate*' (loading = 0.628). It was also made up of people attributes: '*The university is very supportive of students*' (loading = 0.745), '*The academic staff communicate well with students and are easy to access*' (loading = 0.712), and '*The academic staff have good qualifications*' (loading = 0.683). Most of the attributes in component 1 have strong loading factors of over than 0.6, except the two attributes '*The tuition fees are similar to those in other countries*' and '*The university offers a variety of courses*', which have loading factors of less than 0.6. The inclusion of two statements related to price in the factor seems less clear given their low loading scores. Thus, it is appropriate to label for this component 'Product and People'.

Promotion

The second factor comprises 6 attributes. Five of these attributes are related to promotional strategies of the university such as promoting via educational agencies (loading = 0.850), sending staff overseas (loading = 0.824), the British Council (loading = 0.757), educational fairs (loading = 0.732) and university ranking (loading = 0.549). These attributes present strong loadings factor of over 0.6, except for '*The university used university ranking to promote itself*', which has 0.549. The last attributes in this component, which have lowest loading factors, are attributes related to standard tuition fees in the UK. While not directly linked with promotion, it is possibly the case that UK universities promoted that they have standard tuition fees.

Place

The final factor is labelled 'Place'. This is because the attributes in the last component include these statements: '*The university has a good atmosphere in which to study*' (loading = 0.787), '*The transportation to the university is convenient*' (loading = 0.767), '*The university is in a good location*' (loading = 0.766), '*The university is in a safe area*' (loading = 0.743) and '*The town of my university is beautiful*' (loading = 0.543).

After factor analysis, it can be explained that marketing strategies have three important parameters appropriate applied in Thai Market. The first and most significant factor is 'Product and People'. UK universities market themselves by presenting strong higher education characteristics (core products) such as a high standard of quality and good staff qualifications (people). At the same time, university infrastructure can be presented; for example, course duration, the facilities and appropriate class sizes have been applied to persuade international students in Thailand to come to the UK. The second factor is 'Promotion', which can be achieved via different channels including educational agencies, the British Council and university fairs. The final marketing strategy is to use 'Place' to market themselves in the competitive and intense market. For example, UK universities can stress that studying in the UK is very safe for international students and that they have beautiful landscapes and good atmospheres for study and social lives.

Product has been found to be one of the most considered factors for international students to study overseas. These included course length (Lawley and Perry 1998; Chen and Zimitat, 2006), course/programme availability (Chapman, 1981; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Cubillo et al., 2006; Yang, 2007; Maringe and Carter, 2007; Ho and Hung, 2008; Li et al., 2009; Ivy, 2008; Findlay et al., 2010), education quality (Lawley and Perry, 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Cubillo et al., 2006; Pyvis and Chapman, 2007; Maringe, 2006; Maringe and Carter, 2007; Ho and Hung, 2008; Chen and Zimitat, 2006; Daily et al., 2010; Findlay et al., 2010). It also important for the UK higher education as it was reported as the most important marketing strategies for UK universities (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; *Times Higher Education*, 2010c).

In terms of people, academic and support staff is important for providing services for students that are satisfactory in terms of what they pay for. Cubillo et al. (2006) found that the reputation of teaching staff was perceived as an important factor by postgraduate students when selecting an institution. Research by Palihawadana and Holmes (1999) in a UK university reported that students (Norwegian and British students) positively evaluated in every aspect of instructors' characteristics and '*mastery of subject matter*' received the highest score. The reputation of its lecturers is also important for university ranking. In university rankings such as the *THES*, a reputational survey of academics accounts for 40 per cent of the total ranking score (Marginson, 2007b).

Concerning the promotional strategies of UK universities, many researchers have found that a variety of promotional strategies are applied to marketing overseas (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Maringe and Foskett, 2002; Kinnell, 1989; Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007; Cheung et al., 2011 and Gray et al., 2003). The strategies include using alumni, friends and relatives (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003), printed media (Kinnell, 1989; Maringe and Foskett, 2002; Gray et al., 2003; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003), the British Council (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007; Cheung et al., 2011), the internet (Gray et al., 2003; Cheung et al., 2011).

In regard to place, the location of a university can refer to the absolute place where the university is situated and this can determine its success (Isherwood, 1991; Kotler and Fox, 1995). For example, Forbes-Mewett et al. (2010) point out that, when selecting a study destination, safety is a high priority factor in parents' assessments of prospective host countries for their children. Additionally, environment and geographic proximity have been found to influence students' choices of host countries (Mazzarol et al., 1997; Lawley and Perry, 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Chapman, 1981; Lord and Dawson, 2002; Cubillo et al., 2006). Joseph and Joseph (1997) illustrated that 'ideal location' and 'excellent campus layout and appearance' were regarded as two of seven important criteria for selecting an institution in New Zealand.

It appears that only some marketing mix elements are appropriate for marketing UK universities in the Thai market. It can be seen that the results of this study do not present a new marketing mix but re-adjust some aspects of the traditional marketing mix (product, promotion and place) with one service aspect (people). Pricing may not be an appropriate marketing strategy in this and probably other Asian markets because it is not a competitive advantage as people perceive that study in the UK is more expensive than elsewhere (e.g. Kinnell, 1989; Lawley and Perry, 1998; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; *Education Travel Magazine*, 2005; Curtis, 2005; *Independent*, 2008; Li et al., 2009). These have also stated that, in order to attract more international students, there should be lower tuition fees, more scholarships, and a better quality of care and services (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). Also, physical infrastructure and process may not be strong emerging factors to market based on the opinions and attitudes of Thai students. For example, processes such as how examinations are assessed or how registration enquiries are handled do not help map a clear picture of UK higher education for prospective students.

7.5 Educational Agencies

This section focuses on the role of educational agencies in Thailand. Many Thai students use educational agencies to obtain information about studying overseas; thus it seems that educational agencies are an important factor for enhancing the growth of higher education overseas among Thai students.

7.5.1 The Role of Educational Agencies

The outcomes in Table 7.12 show that approximately 43 per cent of the respondents did not use an educational agency to assist them with studying in the UK, while 57 per cent did. This figure is interesting because it is quite high. The British Council (2010a) has found that 41 per cent of prospective international students used or planned to use a consultant from an education agency. Another research undertaken by Zhang (2011) reported that 59 per cent of Chinese

students in the US used an agent to assist in applying to the US. higher education. The result of the current research is thus moderately higher than that of the British Council (2010a) but similarly to that of Zhang (2011).

Table 7.12: The Use of Educational Agencies

	Yes/No	N	Percent
Did you use an educational agency	Yes	188	57.1
	No	141	42.9

Source: Author

Cross tabulation and chi-squared test have been obtained to show the association between the level of current education and the use of educational agencies, the results of which are shown in Table 7.13. The chi- square of 57.255 is significant ($p = 0.00$) and indicates that there is a significant differences between education and the use of educational agency. It is clear that for those respondents who obtain educational agencies (who answer Yes, which is 57.1%), the Masters Degree students was the biggest group that used educational agencies (50.5%), followed by the Ph.D. students (40.4%). The category of 'Other', in contrast, was the smallest group who used the educational agencies (1.6%). On the other hand, for those who did not use the agency for their overseas education, the Doctoral students tended not to use educational agencies (72.3%). The percentage of Bachelors degree students and Masters Degree students who did not use educational agency was similar in number (15.6% and 11.3% respectively). When compared among each education level, high proportion of Masters Degree students tended to use education agency (85.6%) while only 14.4% indicate that they did not consult education agency. For Bachelors Degree and Ph.D. students, it was quite clear that the majority of them tended not to use educational agency (61.1% and 57.3% respectively) within their groups.

Table 7.13: The Association between the Use of Educational Agency and Current Level of Education

Level of Current Education	Use of Educational Agency		Total
	Yes	No	
Bachelor's degree	14 (7.4%)	22 (15.6%)	36 (10.9%)
Within level of education	38.9%	61.1%	100%
Master's degree	95 (50.5%)	16 (11.3%)	111 (33.7%)
Within level of education	85.6%	14.4%	100%
Doctoral degree	76 (40.4%)	102 (72.3%)	178 (54.1%)
Within level of education	42.7%	57.3%	100%
Other	3 (1.6%)	1 (0.7%)	4 (1.2%)
Within level of education	75%	25%	100%
Total	188 (100%)	141 (100%)	329 (100%)

Note: Chi-Square = 57.255, Sig. = 0.000

Source: Author

A significant result of this test is that Bachelor's and Ph.D. students were less likely to use educational agency services than other groups, while master's degree students tend to use educational agencies more than other groups. One possible reason is the majority of Ph.D. students contact prospective supervisors who are interested in their topic directly. As a result, educational agency consultants may not be an important factor for them. Bachelor's degree students may not use agencies because they may have information from their high school teachers.

Table 7.14 analyses whether there is an association between the use of educational agencies and students having friends or family who graduated in the UK. This is because many researchers (e.g. Lawley and Perry, 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Pimpa, 2002a, 2003, 2005) found that friends and family members who lived or graduated overseas have influenced on country's selection. The results show that around 62 per cent of students who used educational agency services had friends or family members who graduated in the UK. Among those who did not use educational agencies, 53.9% of them had friends or family who graduated in the UK, while 46.1% of them did not. The chi-square of 1.98 and significance level of 0.160 indicated that there was no significant association between friends and family graduating in the UK and the use of educational

agencies. This can be interpreted as meaning that having friends or family members who graduated in the UK does not affect the use of educational agencies by students.

Table 7.14: The Association Between the Use of Educational Agencies and Friends/Family Having Graduated in the UK

Friends or Family graduated in the UK	Use of educational agency		Total
	Yes	No	
No	71 (37.8%)	65 (46.1%)	136 (41.3%)
Yes	117 (62.2%)	76 (53.9%)	193 (58.7%)
Total	188 (100%)	141 (100%)	329 (100%)

Note: Chi-Square (Yates Continuity Correlation) = 1.98 , Sig. = 0.160

Source: Author

Next, those respondents who responded that they had used an educational agency were asked to rate their level of agreement with statements regarding the role of educational agency using a 5-point Likert scale, similarly to previous questions.

The outcomes for the role of educational agencies are illustrated in Table 7.15. The statement which received the highest amount of agreement was '*Helped me with the application process*', with a mean score of 4.16. The second highest level agreement was with '*Helped me follow up on contact with universities*' (mean = 4.09), followed by '*Was very convenient to contact*' with a mean score of 4.01. Educational agency services also document preparation (mean = 3.93), working fast (mean = 3.84) and visa preparation (mean = 3.77). However, these roles did not have as much of an impact on the Thai students as the first three statements, which had the mean scores of over 4 (slight agreement). Hence, it seems that educational agencies may have strong impacts in term of assisting the application process and following up on students' application statuses. The students were neutral '*Helped me with general information on UK universities*' (3.40), '*Helped me with university advice*' (3.26) and '*Helped me with course advice*' (3.15). Finally, the statement '*Advised on alternatives to the IELTS English test*' received the lowest amount of agreement with a mean score of 2.73. This means that educational agencies may not be able to sustain a role in English test support.

New Zealand research carried out by Ward and Masgoret (2004) reported that education agencies provided a variety of services required by students. These include applying for study visas, applying to institutions, arranging airport reception, advising on courses of study etc. Among these services, education agencies were found to be more proficient in assisting with visa applications than any other services. This is not the case for Thailand because educational agencies there have a distinct role in assisting Thai students with the application process and following up on the contacts with universities, rather than in visa applications.

Table 7.15: The Role of Educational Agencies

The role of educational agencies	N	Mean	S.D.
Helped me with application process	180	4.16	0.958
Helped me on follow up on contact with universities	181	4.09	0.893
Was very convenient to contact	181	4.01	0.898
Gave information on preparing application documents	181	3.93	0.949
Worked fast.	181	3.84	1.028
Helped me with visa preparation	180	3.77	1.129
Helped me with general information on UK universities	180	3.40	0.919
Helped me with university advice	181	3.26	0.951
Helped me with course advice	181	3.15	0.948
Advised on alternatives to the IELTS English test	179	2.73	1.085

Source: Author

7.5.2 Overall Satisfaction with Educational Agencies and Private

Educational Agencies as a Marketing Strategy for UK Universities

In addition to complementing the fifth objective of the study, this section presents the overall level of satisfaction with educational agencies and its impacts on UK university marketing strategies. In particular, those students who responded and used educational agencies were asked how satisfied they were with the services provided. A 5-point Likert Scale was used in which 1 represented 'very dissatisfied', 2 represented 'dissatisfied', 3 represented 'neither satisfied nor

dissatisfied', 4 represented 'satisfied', and finally 5 represented 'very satisfied'. The results are shown in Table 7.16

In Table 7.16, among the 188 respondents who used educational agencies to help them with studying in the UK, the satisfaction mean score was 3.77. This figure falls between 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' and 'satisfied' but it is closer to satisfied than neutral. Hence, this figure indicates that students who used agencies tended to be satisfied with the services they received. The study by Zhang (2011) found that approximately 70% of Chinese students in the US were satisfied with the service from the agents. When comparing the results with that of Zhang (2011), it can be seen that our results supported that of Zhang (2011).

All respondents (both those who used an agency and those who did not) were then asked for their view of the following statement: '*Private educational agencies are an important marketing strategy for UK universities in order to promote, attract and sell themselves to Thai students*'. A 5-point Likert scale was again used, ranging from 'strongly disagree' (coded with 1) to 'strongly agree' (coded with 5).

Table 7.16: Overall Satisfaction with Educational Agencies

	N	Mean	S.D.
Overall Satisfaction with Educational Agencies	188	3.77	0.874
Private educational agencies are an important marketing strategy for UK universities in order to promote, attract and sell themselves to Thai students	329	3.6	0.942

Source: Author

The outcome is presented in Table 7.16. In this case, the 329 respondents showed a mean score of 3.6, indicating that they agreed with this statement. Therefore, private educational agencies have an impact as a marketing strategy for promoting, attracting and selling UK universities in the Thai market.

7.6 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the results of the quantitative research using a nationwide survey of Thai students in UK universities. In order to derive the outcomes in this chapter, univariate, bivariate and factor analyses were applied to the data. The aim of this chapter was to present results relating to three objectives.

The demographic profile of the respondents has been discussed. The majority of the Thai students had come to study for doctoral degrees rather than undertaking other levels of study, and the majority of the respondents had financial support from the Royal Thai Government. It was found that self and family influences were the most important factors in students selecting the UK as a final study destination. This information may help marketers plan for attracting prospective students by directly focusing on students and their families. Also, the effects of country characteristics and higher education characteristics, as well as the impact of university image, have been discussed. Some results seen in the chapter, for example, the distinctive course lengths in UK universities, have triangulated the results of the interview phase in the Chapter 5 in that students regarded this as the strongest reason for choosing to come to the UK. Additionally, many previous researchers have found that university ranking impacts students' university choices (Federkeil, 2002; Federkeil, 2009; Hazelkorn, 2008) and the results in this chapter are consistent with these researchers.

While the internet has been regarded as the most important source of marketing materials/influencers in three Asian countries (Gray et al, 2003), the results in this chapter consistent with Gray et al, 2003) because '*WWW/Internet*' were found as one of the most strongest marketing source of Thai students applying UK universities. As mentioned in the literature, the growing number of higher education institutes in the global market makes it inevitable that they will have to compete for higher numbers of international students, especially international students from Asia, who make up the biggest demand in the global market. The concept of marketing mix has also been applied to higher education institutes. The traditional marketing mix (4Ps: Product, Price, Place and Promotion) and the service

marketing mix (7Ps) have both been used in education marketing (Ivy, 2008). While attempting to analyse the marketing mix which has been used in Thailand, it was found that three important parameters were appropriate in the market. These three strategies comprise a combination of 4 out of the 7Ps in the service marketing mix: Product and People, Promotion and Place.

The role of educational agencies was found to be important for students because 57 per cent of the respondents indicated that they consulted educational agencies before studying in the UK. Among all the respondents, master's degree students were found to use such agencies the most. T-tests were used to determine if there was an association between the use of educational agencies and students having friends or family members who graduated in the UK. The outcome was that there was no significant difference between students who did have friends or family members who graduated in the UK and students who do not in terms of the use of educational agencies. This means that this does not have impact on the use of educational agencies because more than 60 per cent of the students who used educational agencies had friends or family who had graduated in the UK. This confirms that educational agencies may help UK institutions support prospective students who plan to study overseas.

Chapter Eight

Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

Overseas study is in growing demand among international students from all over the world and competition among education-exporting countries is increasing and becoming more intense (Cubillo et al., 2006). The US, UK and Australia do their best to attract international students to their countries. It is important to these countries to understand their market position in order to maintain competitiveness in the market. As the second leader, after the US, the UK has to discover strategies that are suited to its target market. At the same time, providing high standard service quality in UK higher education in order to meet international students' expectations is one of the key successes of UK universities. Given this, UK universities can distinguish themselves from the competition by truly delighting students. This thesis has aimed to investigate higher education in the UK from Thai perspectives, including both outsiders related to higher education in Thailand and students who have experienced UK higher education. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed in this study to enhance the results.

The focus of this chapter is to review the main findings of this thesis according to the objectives set at the beginning of the research. The chapter starts with the findings on the perceptions of UK higher education among Thai executives. Factors relating to different decision-making choices and marketing strategies in the Thai market, as well as the role of educational agencies in Thailand, are also summarised. The expectations and perceived experiences of students and the gap between them are clarified in this section and are also presented. Following this, the implications and key contributions of this study are stated. It is also important to highlight the limitations of this study. Finally, the chapter concludes with recommendations for possible future research.

8.2 Summary of Main Findings

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, this thesis aims to investigate UK higher education in relation to Thai perspectives, including both outsiders related to higher education in Thailand and Thai students with experience of UK study. Based on the results of the qualitative and quantitative approaches used, the key findings of this study are broken down into five sections which reflect the objectives of this research.

8.2.1 To Identify the Perception of UK Higher Education among Executives in Thailand's Higher Education (Objective 1)

Under this first objective, the results from interviewing nine executives from higher education organizations and the public sector in Thailand indicate that the majority of respondents have a positive perception of the reputation of UK higher education. These views come from both respondents who have graduated outside the UK (e.g. the US and France) and those who graduated in the UK. The results reveal that the reputation of UK higher education results from a variety of factors, such as the long history of British education, the originality of British education in the world and British universities' ability to maintain quality assurance. This finding supports that of Kinnell (1989). However, it appears that although the good reputation for educational quality in the UK is perceived as its benefit, previous literature confirms that studying in the UK has a relatively higher cost than in its counterparts (Lawley and Perry, 1998; Li et al., 2009). Our findings indicate that sending students to the UK is more costly than sending them to other education-exporting countries. In addition, UK universities are also perceived as conservative in terms of epistemology, people and the individuality of graduates. The results also reveal that social standing, or the concept of 'Puu Dee', is another perception that persists in respondents' views. Thai students who graduate from the UK are called 'Puu Dee Ang Krit' and are regarded as a sophisticated and elite group in Thai society (Thaipost, 2012). Recently, the concept of 'Puu Dee' has gradually changed from referring to people from an upper-class background to include people who have been educated in the UK (National Archive of Thailand, Tor 49/7). Therefore, being

educated in the UK has become an important social value in terms of being formed into 'Puu Dee Ang Krit'. This finding is congruent with the research carried out by Lawley and Perry (1998), in that there was a general perception among Thai students that the UK is the destination of the elite. Our research also found that students who graduate from the UK have some characteristics which are similar to UK higher education characteristics; for example, they have individuality and are regarded as 'Puu Dee Ang Krit'. They also have a strong sense of ethics and are good thinkers, trustworthy and polymaths.

In terms of higher education in other countries, the findings confirm that each country has some strengths in its higher education. For example, higher education in Australia and New Zealand is regarded as having similar levels of qualification to UK higher education. Our findings highlight that US higher education is regarded as having a good variety of courses but also as being of lower quality than UK higher education. The perception of Japanese higher education can be seen as proving that its higher education standards have reached the same level as the US and the UK.

Since all the respondents indicated a positive personal perception that UK higher education has a good reputation for educational quality, the researcher wanted to find out whether there was a relationship between their personal perception of UK higher education and the likelihood of recommending overseas study destinations to the scholarship students/staff in their organizations. Surprisingly, the interview results show that none of them prefer to recommend the UK over other countries. This proves that although they agree on the educational reputation of UK higher education, there are other factors which are more important than their personal perceptions and preferences. These factors include the different policies of each organization, e.g. relating to areas of study and educational systems, as well as expense and spreading staff across a variety of countries.

8.2.2 To Investigate Factors Relating to Students' Decision Making Regarding Studying in the UK (Objective 2)

To research objective 2, triangulation between methods has been utilised (see Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2). There were interviews with seventeen students at a provincial UK university (University D) and a nationwide survey of 339 respondents.

The interviews indicate that the decision making involved in choosing a country is a complex process. A variety of factors are involved in selecting a particular country. In the case of the UK, these factors include course length and cost, country characteristics, the British accent, recommendations from others, course availability, looking for change, entry requirements, scholarship conditions, and the reputation and quality of the education.

Although previous research has found that the main reason for international students choosing the UK is its educational quality (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Merrick and Robinson, 2006; *Times Higher Education*, 2010b), the findings from this study indicate that the duration of the master's course in the UK, which is only nine months, is the main reason. This means lower living costs for such students. Lawley and Perry (1998) and Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) confirm that the duration of master's degree courses in the UK is shorter than in countries such as the US and Australia. The findings from the questionnaire also show 'the length of the course' as the most important reason, with the highest mean score of 4.23, in terms of higher education characteristics influencing students' decisions to study in the UK.

In terms of students deciding to choose a particular university, both internal and external factors influence decision making. For internal factors, the findings indicate that university ranking was the most frequent factor, being commented on by 82 per cent of students. Many students believed in university ranking and lodged their application forms with many universities in the top 10 or top 20 in the list. The results of the nationwide questionnaire also confirm the interview findings

with a high agreement score of 4.19 for the statement '*UK university ranking influences Thai student' decisions to study at a UK university*'. The WWW/internet were reported to be the best source of information for students with regard to university ranking, followed by the British Council (with mean scores of 4.04 and 3.66 respectively).

In addition to university ranking, our findings also reveal that fast responses from admissions offices and a lack of a dissertation requirement are also influential factors in the decision to choose a particular university. External factors, such as word of mouth, city characteristics, refusals from other universities and the conditions of scholarships, also have some significant impacts for students when they select a university.

In the nationwide questionnaires, it is found that faculty image has stronger impact on students than university image because students are likely to make their decision to choose a particular university because of the image of the faculty or school rather than that of the university. This lack of alignment between faculty and university images in the Thai market could potentially damage the brand image of the university as a whole (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007 and Chapleo, 2007)

In terms of deciding to go overseas, Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) found that students who decided to study in other countries were greatly influenced by overseas courses being better than local ones, finding it difficult to enter local universities and courses not being available in local universities. This study adds that the benefits arising from an overseas degree when students return home are key to Thai students deciding to go overseas. These benefits include more career opportunities, overseas experience, knowledge, connections with friends and supervisors, and family pride.

8.2.3 To Investigate the Marketing Strategies of UK Higher Education Used in Thailand (Objective 3)

The main task of this objective is to investigate marketing strategies used in the Thai market. It is found that the most effective marketing aspects for the Thai market are those related to quality of education, safety, location, facilities, course design, course duration and academic staff qualifications. Among these aspects, safety, location and staff qualifications are indicated as the strongest marketing aspects for UK universities promoting themselves in the Thai market. The impact of safety is important for UK universities because many researchers have found that this issue is of great concern to both students and their parents when students go to study abroad (Arambewela and Hall, 2009 and Forbes-Mewett et al., 2010).

Additionally, factor analysis has been used to analyse the twenty-four statements relating to marketing aspects into smaller factors and a more manageable set of information. From this, three main components of marketing strategies are derived. Factor 1: Product and People (common variance 26.33), Factor 2: Promotion (common variance 14.93), Factor 3: Place (common variance 14.54). These three components explain almost 60% of the total variance of the attributes. These three components arise from a combination of four of the existing 7Ps in the service marketing mix (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1995). These findings suggest that, for example, UK universities should market themselves by presenting the strengths of higher education characteristics, such as the high quality of their standards, course duration, facilities and staff qualifications. They also reveal that a pricing strategy may not be appropriate for UK higher education in Thailand. This is consistent with many studies in higher education which have found that the cost of study in the UK is the most expensive compared to other countries (Kinnell, 1989; Lawley and Perry, 1998; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; *Education Travel Magazine*, 2005; Curtis, 2005 and Li et al., 2009).

8.2.4 To Investigate the Role of Educational Agencies in Thailand and Student Satisfaction Levels (Objective 4)

In line with research conducted in New Zealand by Ward and Masgoret (2004), in the UK by the British Council (2010a) and in the US by Zhang (2011), it is found that educational agencies have a significant role in assisting international students to study abroad. The findings in Thailand are clear that approximately 57 per cent of the sample used agents. Among the three groups of respondents, the master's degree students were the most likely to use educational agencies to assist them. The undergraduate and doctoral students, in contrast, tended not to use agents. Additionally, the findings also indicate that the service provided by educational agencies has a strong impact in terms of the application process, university contact and convenience. In terms of satisfaction with the service from the agents, the score of 3.77 shows high levels of satisfaction among the students.

Existing literature highlights that information from friends and family members who have studied or lived abroad has a large impact on international students in terms of their country decisions (Lawley and Perry, 1998; Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002; Pimpa 2002a, 2003, 2005). This research tests whether educational agencies impact students who have friends and family in the UK differently from those students who have not. The findings show that there is no significant difference in terms of using agents between the two groups, which means that both groups consult educational agencies.

8.2.5 To Investigate the Expectation–Experience Gap that Current Thai Students Experience in Relation to UK Higher Education (Objective 5)

Since service quality has been defined as the discrepancy or gap between a consumer's expectation and experience of a service (Parasuraman et al., 1988), the discrepancy gap concept has been widely supported and modified in research related to service quality in higher education (e.g. Hill, 1995; Lee et al., 2000; Arambewela et al., 2005; Mai, 2005; Barnes, 2007; Arambewela and Hall, 2008).

However, from reviewing the existing literature, the majority of research in higher education service quality appears to be strongly based on perceptions of service quality or, if expectations and experiences are compared, cross-sectional work is used, leading to biased results. To overcome the methodology gap, a longitudinal study is necessary (Rowley, 1997). Given this, a longitudinal study has been set up in this research in order to meet the final objective. This longitudinal study includes 2 phases. Phase 1 involves interviews about 17 students' expectations before attending a provincial university, and phase 2 involves interviews about the same 17 students' perceptions of their actual experiences after attending the university for a period of time. The services of the university within six areas are investigated: location, teaching quality and teaching facilities, support staff, library and computing and IT facilities, accommodation, and social life.

In the expectation phase, the students had high expectations of the library service (4.41) and this was the highest expectation among the six university service provision categories. These findings reflect the fact library services are important for students. This may be caused by them spending most of their time researching and studying in the library. On the other hand the lowest expectations related to social activities and clubs. Many students commented that they knew that many activities would be provided for them but they felt they would not have time to join. It was found that, on one hand, students' expectations were formed by their previous experiences at other universities, which is consistent with Hill (1995). On the other hand, it can be indicated that students' expectation levels resulted from information given by the university's website. Therefore, it is important that universities should provide honest information to create appropriate expectations among students.

After a nine-month period, students' perceptions of their experiences were tracked with the same students, based on the service quality gap concept (P-E). The library experience obtained the lowest perception score (2.41) and showed the biggest discrepancy (-2) between the two phases. Many students commented on dissatisfaction with library services such as the building, seating, books, electronic resources and borrowing systems. The quality of teaching also had low scores

(3.12), representing low satisfaction with this experience. In contrast, the findings indicate that safety received the highest perception score, followed by the quality of support staff service (4.41 and 4.12, respectively).

Table 6.11 in Chapter Six shows the gap between expectations and perceptions of experiences. Among 11 topics from six categories, the university performs well in five topics. These topics are geographic location, convenience of travel, safety, support staff service, and social activities and clubs; as indicated by positive gap scores. However, the total gap score of -0.36 indicates that the university does not perform well in the views of these students in general. It appears that the biggest mismatch gap is the quality of the library, with the biggest discrepancy of -2. Wakefield and Blodgett (1994) support the idea that since students spend a lot of time in the library, there will be direct impacts on students' perceptions if a failure of occurs in the library's service. The findings on the gap between expectations and experiences confirm that the most problematic areas in for university service relate to academic service factors (e.g. library, computing and IT facilities, and the quality of teaching and teaching facilities). Meanwhile, non-academic service factors, for example support staff and location, were the least problematic areas.

8.3 Implications of the Research

The findings of this thesis are gathered from many respondents. Some are students studying in UK universities nationwide. Some are executives from higher education in Thailand. This latter group comprises experienced people who are in higher education in another country, so getting their views provided an opportunity to enrich the quality of the research findings in this thesis. The findings of this study may be of interest to marketers and policy makers who are responsible for increasing the opportunities of UK higher education in the intensely competitive higher education market between education-exporting countries.

First of all, since the service quality gap results from the discrepancy between expectations and experiences (P-E), if the level of expectation exceeds experience, this gap occurs. In contrast, if expectations are lower than

experiences, positive service quality is achieved (Pothas et al., 2001). Hence, expectation is a key factor in bridging the gap. This thesis has found that the level of expectation is affected by three important factors: previous experiences, university ranking and the information students receive from universities. To manage students' expectations, these three factors should be taken into consideration by universities. However, the first two factors (previous experiences and university ranking) are out of the control of universities and policy makers. In contrast, information from universities can be managed. Since the results in Chapter 5 show that receiving information on a university via its website and educational agencies has a direct impact on students' expectations, being able to forward the right and honest information on service quality to prospective students is a key way for universities to manage students' expectations. For example, pictures of universities or clip videos introducing them, their infrastructures and their people are needed (Barnes, 2007).

Secondly, the findings in this thesis, gathered from the interviews and the nationwide questionnaire, reveal that although education in the UK is perceived as being of high quality, it is also considered expensive. This may be its weakness in comparison to its competitors, e.g. the US, Australia and New Zealand. This makes it difficult for UK higher education institutes to compete with their counterparts in the global market. Higher education policy-makers should take this issue into account. The finding showed that UK was not chosen by international students because of the cost of studying and added that Australian higher education was perceived as being of the same standard as in the UK but at a lower cost. Additionally, the findings from the factor analysis in this research suggest that there are only three key components of marketing strategies which seem appropriate for the Thai market: Product and People, Promotion, and Place. Pricing is not an appropriate strategy for marketing UK higher education in Thailand because its price is not competitive. This information has helped to shed light on how the competitive intelligence of the UK is hindered by the high cost of studying in the country. Many scholars of higher education support the idea that education costs in the UK are disadvantageous in terms of UK higher education institutes competing in the world market (e.g. Kinnell, 1989; Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003). A more

favourable exchange rate for international students might make of UK universities more competitive. Furthermore, Binsardi and Ekwulugo (2003) suggest that the best way to attract more international students to the UK is to reduce tuition fees and provide more scholarships. This is consistent with research undertaken by Yang (2007), in that price concerned Chinese students who chose Australia as their final destination even though their first preference was to study elsewhere. However, this suggested strategy of price reduction may not be feasible for the UK university situation given the reality of how things are at the time this thesis is being written. Universities across England have been faced with university funding cuts since 2011. As a consequence of this, UK universities have had to look for higher contributions from their students (Greenaway, 2012). It has also been reported that the impact of the cuts will affect students in that universities are being pushed to charge students higher fees to balance the books (Paton, 2013). According to Ratcliffe (2013), the introduction of higher fees for British students in September 2012 caused a large drop in enrolments in many UK universities. Universities have been given power to charge British and EU students up to a maximum cap of £9,000. For international students, in contrast, there is no cap, which means they can be charged far higher tuition fees than local students (Paton, 2012a, b). Therefore, they are a lucrative source of university income, meaning that many universities plan to recruit more international students in order to prop up the higher education budget (Paton, 2012b). One professor at a university commented that “it had started to become uneconomic to take home students, so why not simply recruit the high-fee-paying foreign ones?” (Paton, 2012a); hence, international students are being recruited as cash cows by universities. Thus, it seems to be unrealistic to look for lower tuition fees for international students at this time since UK universities need fees income.

The results in Section 7.4.1 and Table 7.8 illustrate that the British Council and educational agencies represent the least influential marketing materials/influencers for students studying in the UK, however, educational agencies are still provide worthwhile assistance for many students, especially potential master's students (Table 7.13). Additionally, educational agencies are an important source of information and assistance services; not only for students who do not have friends

or family members who have graduated in the UK but also for students who do have friends or family members who have graduated in the UK (Table 7.14). In this sense, when students have information from their contacted agencies, it is no doubt that students will form their expectation according to the information they gathered from those agencies. Later this will shape their learning experience at their university. As they are a good source of information on universities in the UK, close work and harmony between educational agencies in Thailand and UK universities is a very important issue for many universities. The British Council (2010a) aims to ensure that a high level of customer care is provided by agencies to students who are considering the UK. Hence, the British Council should provide seminars or training for staff of educational agencies in Thailand on a regular basis in order to build their knowledge and capability. At the same time, the British Council should support the establishment of new UK educational agencies in Thailand in major cities other than Bangkok, e.g. Chiang Mai, Khon Khen and Hat Yai. Given this, prospective students who live outside Bangkok would have more opportunities to contact nearby agencies.

Chapter Six shows the service quality found in a leading UK university. After putting scores in rank order, it is found that most dissatisfaction arises in categories which related to academic factors; for instance; the library, the quality of teaching and teaching support facilities. The library showed the biggest discrepancy between the two phases. This is an area in need of urgent consideration by the university. The fact that the students are not satisfied with library services such as numbers of copies of books, seating, noise and lighting should addressed as soon as possible. In terms of quality of teaching, it is important that the university should provide proper training for new academic staff on topics such as 1) how to deal with teaching international students who come from different backgrounds and cultures, 2) how to deliver appropriate teaching styles to students and 3) how to organise feedback and marking of exams or papers. Since UK universities are promoted as the 'best in the world', international students expect to receive world class education (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007). It is important that the institute should take the service quality gap into consideration in order to manage and deliver its services to meet students' expectation. In fact, every

university should make sure that its facilities are of an acceptable standard to international students.

Finally, both sets of interview results confirm that recommendations from former lecturers and/or supervisors in Thai universities greatly influence students' decisions to choose UK universities. These findings clearly show that lecturers who have graduated in the UK, are key persons in terms of recommending that prospective students study in the universities they graduated from. This finding also has fruitful implications for lecturers in Thailand and other countries. Therefore, UK universities should deliver adequate service quality to all students as one day they may become ambassadors of UK universities and UK higher education. Additionally, in the case of Thailand, UK universities and the British Council should provide cooperative schemes with Thai universities to offer scholarships to students who wish to study in the UK. For example, scholarships offered to lecturers in Thai universities for their Ph.D. studies, the Memorandum of Agreement with the Office of the Higher Education Commission (OHEC) in order to help with English requirements, and assistance with the application process for UK universities for university academic staff who have a scholarship from the Thai government or a Thai university. Such schemes tend to be long-term strategies; however, Tony Blair has claimed that after these students have graduated in the UK they have a lasting tie to the country and institutions (British Council, 2004).

8.4 Key Contributions

By using well-established multiple survey methods combining mixed methodology and the long-term investigation of a longitudinal study to provide optimal results, this research bring a significant piece of knowledge to the pool of service quality in the higher education field. It also makes a methodological contribution to the existing decision-making literature.

8.4.1 Contribution to Methodology

As mentioned in Chapter Two and Chapter Six, the service quality of a university should be measured not only when students are in the university but also before they arrive in order to track the change between their expectations and their experiences (Rowley, 1997). Furthermore, the majority of the research with regard to expectations-experiences in higher education usually ask respondents to rate their agreement levels for both expectations and perceptions of experiences in the same questionnaire (e.g. Joseph and Joseph, 1997; Ford et al., 1999; Arambewela, 2003; Mai, 2005; Arambewela and Hall, 2006; Douglas et al., 2006). It is very difficult for students to recall their expectations and their experiences at the same time and this leads to biased results. Applying a longitudinal study to international students in higher education represents the most original and innovative piece of this research. It offers the researcher the possibility of providing insight into how the expectations of international students from Thailand are formed and why changes have taken place. These are things which much existing research in higher education has failed to investigate. This research makes a contribution by investigating the gap between expectations and perceptions of experiences among students. Although longitudinal research is expensive and time-consuming for both researchers and respondents, this is off-set by the richness of data collected from the respondents because the researcher and respondents have to keep in touch for a period of time. In this way, informal relationships and trust are formed between and students open their minds more to the researcher.

8.4.2 Contribution to Educational Decision-Making

Another contribution of this study is that it provides additional factors in students' decisions to come to the UK. Previous researchers have claimed that the quality of education in the UK is the main reason why international students choose to study in this country (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Merrick and Robinson, 2006; *Times Higher Education*, 2010b). Our findings, in contrast, show that the main reason why Thai students decide to come to the UK is the shorter master's degree course

length compared to other countries. A master's degree course in the UK takes only nine months, which means that students can save on tuition fees and living costs.

Additionally, our findings add to the literature on decision making in higher education by international students by examining additional push-pull factors in greater detail. The comparison between Mazzarol and Soutar (2002) and the findings of the author's study are shown in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1: Push-Pull Model in Comparison

Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002	Author
Push Factors involved in a decision to go abroad	
Overseas Course better than local	Career opportunity
Difficult to enter local universities	Overseas experiences
Local course is not available	Knowledge
Better understanding of the West	People's connections
Migration opportunity	Family Expectation
Pull Factors involved in a country's selection	
Recommendation from friends and relatives	Recommendation from friends and relatives
Cost	Cost
Knowledge of the host country	British English
Environment	Country characteristics
Geographic Proximity	Duration of study
Social links	Course availability
	Entry requirement
	Quality of Education
	Scholarship conditions
Pull Factors involved in a university's selection	
Recognition by employers	University ranking (internal factors)
Reputation for quality	University reputation (internal factors)
Links to other institutions	No dissertation requirement (internal factors)
Course range	Administrative responses (internal factors)
Offshore teaching programs	Information from the university (internal factors)
Staff expertise	Word of mouth (external factors)
	City characteristics (external factors)
	Refusal from other universities (external factors)
	Scholarship conditions (external factors)

Source: Mazzarol and Soutar, 2002 and Author

As can be seen from Table 8.1, a variety of factors are involved in each stage of students' decision making. Initially, the benefits of an overseas degree that students will get when they return home influence them to go overseas (i.e. more career opportunities at home, overseas experiences, knowledge, connections and

family pride). These factors differ from the push factors of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), which rely greatly on aspects related to the availability of course and educational opportunity at home that influence students to leave the country. They also differ from Tarry (2008), who found that lack of confidence in the Thai education system was the main factor influencing Thai students to study abroad. Once students have decided to study overseas, the next decision is to choose a country. In this study, the UK is selected ahead of its competitors because of shorter course lengths and therefore lower educational costs. Studying in the UK also provides an opportunity for students to travel in Europe. The quality of the education, course availability, entry requirements and recommendations from others are also important factors for students. As mentioned earlier in section 5.3.1 and Table 5.3, two of these two factors (living and study costs and recommendations from relatives and friends) are similar to that of Mazzarol and Soutar (2002). At the university level, selecting a university is not a one-step process because students examined internal factors (e.g. administrative response, no dissertation requirement) in association with external factors (e.g. city characteristics, word of mouth from friends and refusal from other universities they applied to)

As previously discussed in Chapter 5, a proposed model of Thai students' decision making about the UK (Objective 2) is summarized in Figure 8.1, below.

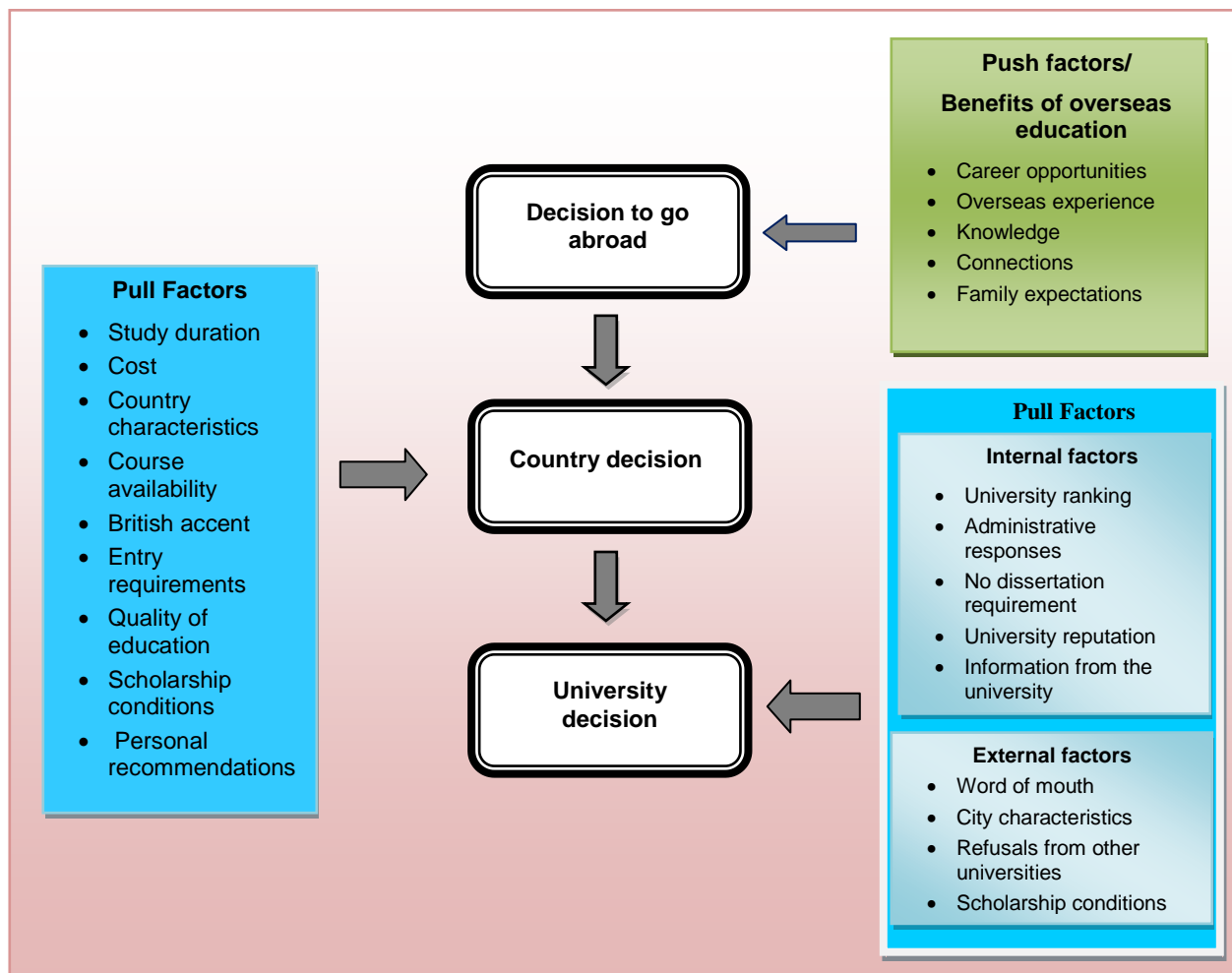


Figure 8.1: Proposed Model of Thai Students Decision Making About the UK

Source: Author

The proposed model summarized the factors relating to students' decision making of Thai students based on the findings in Phase. In Phase 2 where the service quality gap was examined, the findings were based on the discrepancy between students' expectations and actual experiences of the university. In this study, expectations were found to be a key factor to bridge the service quality gap. Service quality can be linked to aspects of decision making in that the performance of the university in national rankings along with the information given to potential applicants shapes the decision making of prospective students. Furthermore, the experiences from students' who graduated in a UK university might be passed to their friends and relatives after they returned to Thailand. Positive comments will

have a great impact to a particular university in terms of helping prospective students makes their decision easier.

8.5 Limitations

Several limitations in this research need to be addressed and taken into consideration. These limitations have occurred at different stages of the research; for example, in the sampling and the data collection.

One limitation is the constraints of time and money when conducting the research. This study combines qualitative and quantitative approaches. Four sets of interviews with three different groups of people and one nationwide questionnaire have been conducted in this research in a limited amount of time. Therefore, the researcher has had to travel to different locations, e.g. London and Bangkok. These activities consume time and money for travelling and accommodation. The researcher has managed to organise the necessary activities, e.g. contacting the informants, conducting the interviews, undertaking the questionnaires and data analysis, in a limited amount of time. In the case of interviewing 17 students in a provincial UK university, as this was a longitudinal study these students were re-interviewed after a nine-month period, prolonging the completion of the thesis.

The first objective involved interviewing Thai executives in leading universities, higher education organizations and a private enterprise; these people were regarded as elite. The researcher found some limitations in the process of gaining entry and permission to speak to these respondents. Two official letters and informal contacts from a person with similar authority and position to these respondents were used to overcome these limitations. After this process, nine respondents agreed to be interviewed. Next, the researcher faced difficulties in making appointments for interviews. This was because all the respondents were in Bangkok but the researcher was in Suratthani, in the south of Thailand. To save on the travel and accommodation budget, the aim was to undertake the interviews within one journey. Therefore, the appointments had to be within no more than

seven days. However, the researcher could not make these appointments as planned. Fortunately, with the kind support of the same person who had similar authority and position to these respondents, these limitations were overcome. The appointments were made four days in a row. Nevertheless, the researcher found further difficulty on the interview days. Some of the respondents had limited time because they were so busy with their meetings and the researcher had to finish interviewing some respondents within 15 minutes. Therefore, some questions were skipped, resulting in some important data being missing. The respondents' profiles were also received from respondents' secretaries to save time. Furthermore, of these nine respondents, only one was female. Although this reflects the hierarchical structure in many Thai organizations, it would have been better if more female respondents had been accessed in order to provide more insights concerning differing views between genders.

The final limitation was related to the student respondents. It would have been helpful if this research had gained a larger sample for the nationwide questionnaires. The results in Chapter Seven show that 68% of the respondents were sponsored by the Royal Thai Government and private companies, while only 29% were supported by family or themselves. This is because the Office of Educational Affairs at The Royal Thai Embassy in London could only forward the link to the online questionnaire to governmental scholarship students; it could not forward the link to self-funding students due to privacy and safety issues. The resulting lack of access to self-funded students may have affected the findings on factors influencing students' decisions. Furthermore, to research objective five, the researcher interviewed master's degree students only due to time limitations. This group of students is selected because it takes the greatest proportion of Thai students in the UK (see Table 1.1). Therefore, the results do not represent the views of bachelor's degree and Ph.D. students, which may differ from those of master's students.

8.6 Implications for Further Research

As mentioned in the previous section, several limitations have been identified and considered in this study. These limitations can be seen as a signpost for the implications for future research considered in this section. Furthermore, this study is only an attempt to present first-hand results, so further research is required in the following areas.

Firstly, future research should test the proposed model of Thai students' decision making about the UK in Figure 8.1. There should be tests of whether the model works in general. A questionnaire is needed to undertake such testing with a larger population. Given this, a statistical test could help clarify problems, e.g. the most influential factor, the relationships between factors and the differences among groups of students. This model may be an important framework for understanding the factors motivating students because the number of international students has increased and therefore understanding students' behaviour relating to decision making is vital for education exporting countries in order to survive in the current intense market conditions. The decision to study overseas is one of the most significant and expensive initiatives that students and their families may ever take (Mazzarol, 1998).

Secondly, in the interviewing of seventeen students at a provincial UK university, the researcher originally planned to collect the data in three stages: before arrival at the university, at the university and after the students returned to Thailand. This was because the researcher wanted to track their performances after they had graduated and return home. However, due the limitations of time and cost it was not feasible to conduct all three stages for this thesis. Therefore, it is suggested that future research could study, for example, how satisfied students are after graduation or how they are able to apply their knowledge to their jobs.

Thirdly, this study focuses on the views of Thai respondents only. It is recommended that future research building upon this study should consider international students from other countries and compare differences between them.

For example, a comparison could be made of the views of the service quality of UK universities among Asian and European students. Their views of universities' performances as well as factors related to their decision making may provide further insight and information for UK universities as well as different results due to cultural, political and economic differences.

Fourthly, further future research should involve a comparative study of service quality views among international students and home/EU students because the latter are also the main customers of universities. By doing this, the survey would help to uncover those factors which are important to the two groups. These factors may differ as a result of different personal backgrounds, previous experiences, expectation levels and cultures. Given the recent rise in education costs, in which the maximum fee level for British students was tripled to £9,000 a year from September 2012 the level of students' expectations may increase as they will demand more for their money. This is another important issue for UK universities. The ideal is that universities should ensure that both groups of students are satisfied with the service quality and that, if they are not satisfied, there are ways to improve the services. However, the first stage, as this research has shown, is to identify the service quality gap before it can be rectified

Finally, as mentioned in Chapter 2, the number of offshore campuses is expanding, with more than 200 campuses in 36 countries (*Times Higher Education*, 2012b). The UK is one of the leaders in offshore campuses overseas, with 25 recent examples of such developments (Matthews, 2012). Hence, these institutions are another worthwhile area for UK higher education to take into consideration in addition to traditional international students travelling to a host country. Since quality monitoring and quality assurance has been introduced, similar facilities and educational quality between onshore and offshore campuses are needed (Nicholls, 1987; Altbach and Knight, 2007). It would be fruitful if future research could be conducted on the learning experience and/or service quality facilities of such developments.

Appendices

Appendix1: Stage 1 Interviews

Interview Question Plan

Section 1: Demographic information

1. First of all, could you please introduce yourself?
 - Name
 - Where you are from
 - Highest qualification
 - Work experience
2. What are you studying?
3. How long have you been studying in this university?
4. How long have you been in the UK?
5. Please tell me whether you have friends or family studying here or who have studied here
6. Can you tell me about your family?
.....
7. How do you get financial support while you are studying in the UK?
.....
8. Would you mind telling me your age?
.....

Section 2: The effect of international ranking and university image

9. Who influenced you your decision to study in the UK and at your university?
.....
10. By what criteria and how do you compare UK HE with other countries?
.....

11. Can you explain what it was about UK universities that encouraged you to make the decision to study here? (Or, what factors influenced your decision to study in UK?)

.....

12. What kind of image does the town of your chosen university possess?

.....

13. How did these kinds of images affect your decision to choose UK HE?

- University's image
- Faculty's image
- Sporting achievements
- Town's historical image

Which one is the most important to you?

.....

14. Please name any two universities and tell me what image you have of them

1.

2.

15. Why did you decide to go to this university? And which factors did you consider important in making this choice?

.....

16. Can you give me any other factors that affected your decision to come to the UK?

.....

17. What is your overall impression of the university?

.....

18. Do you know about UK university ranking?

.....

<u>IF YES</u>	<u>IF NO</u>
How did you find out about UK university ranking?	If you don't know about UK university ranking,
.....	what about your university
.....	ranking... what do you think?
.....

19. Please explain how UK university ranking affects UK university brand image
-
-
20. Does UK university ranking encourage Thai students to choose the UK? How?
(Please explain & give an example)
-
-
21. When someone asks you which university you are at and you tell them, how do they react?
-
-

Section 3: Marketing strategies and educational agencies

Now we will move on to marketing strategies of UK HE used in Thailand.

22. How did you get information on studying in the UK?
-
23. What is the best source of information for students/you about studying in the UK and in this university?
-
24. In your opinion, if you know about Coca Cola's marketing approach, do you think universities market themselves in the same way?
-
-
25. How do you feel about the ... of UK HE
1. Product (course)
 -
 2. Price (tuition fees)
 -
 3. Place (location, image of city, sporting facilities, image of country)
 -
 4. Promotion (advertising, education fair)
 -

5. Which was the key factor in choosing UK HE for your study destination? (Please give your reasons)

.....

26. Could you please choose the promotional strategies that encountered when you were thinking/collecting data that made you interested in studying in the UK? (List is provided.)

.....

27. In your opinion, how can UK HE do more to attract higher numbers of Thai students to study in UK? (Explain the key factors)

.....

.....

28. In your mind, what are the strengths and weaknesses of UK HE? (Please give examples)

.....

.....

29. What are the roles of the educational agencies in Thailand that you have had contact with? Please explain.....

.....

Contact	No contact
- What happened after you contacted the agency?	Please explain how you applied to a UK university?
- How long did you have contact with the agency for?
- Did they mention university ranking?
- How satisfied were you with the agency?	

30. What do you find to be the hardest factor in the process of studying here?

.....

List provided for Question 26

Choose 2 from the list:

- Newspaper
- Educational fair
- Private educational agency
- Government educational agency (British council/OCSC)
- UK university alumni
- Friends
- UK university prospectuses
- Web-sites
- Local universities, colleges
- Others

(Please specify.....)

Appendix 2: Questionnaire



Pimprae Buddhichiwin
University of Exeter

This questionnaire aims to discover what Thai students think about studying in UK Universities. This is a part of my PhD research and all information will be treated in the strictest confidence. I would be extremely grateful for your help. Thank you for your cooperation.

Instruction

1. The questionnaire has 4 parts.
Part 1: General Information
Part 2: Country and Higher Education Characteristics, UK University Ranking and University Image
Part 3: Marketing Strategies of UK Universities
Part 4: The Role of Educational Agencies
2. Please ✓ in the appropriate places or write your opinion in the spaces provided.

General Information

- 1 **What is your Gender?** ☐ male ☐ female
- 2 **How old are you?**

<input type="checkbox"/> less than 20	<input type="checkbox"/> 40-49
<input type="checkbox"/> 20-29	<input type="checkbox"/> over 50
<input type="checkbox"/> 30-39	
- 3 **Which part of Thailand you are from?** _____
- 4 **Do you have any full-time work experience?**

<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes (please specify _____)
-----------------------------	--
- 5 **How long have you been in the UK? (Since beginning the current course)**

<input type="checkbox"/> less than 6 months	<input type="checkbox"/> 6 months – 1 year
<input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 years	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 - 3 years
<input type="checkbox"/> more than 3 years	
- 6 **Before you came to study in the UK, did you have friends or family studying or already graduated from the UK?**

<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
------------------------------	-----------------------------
- 7 **Which university are you studying at now?**

8 At which level are you studying?

- ☐ Bachelor's degree
☐ Ph.D.

- ☐ Master's degree
☐ other
(please specify _____)

9 How do you get financial support?

- ☐ parents
☐ personal
☐ commercial company (please specify _____)
☐ other (please specify _____)
- ☐ The Royal Thai Government

Country and Higher Education Characteristics, UK University ranking , and university image

10 Please give your responses to the following factors

To what extent did the following factors influence you to study in the UK?		Not at all	Slightly influenced	Greatly influenced
		1	2	3
1	Myself			
2	Family			
3	Friends			
4	My sponsor in my home country			
5	UK graduates/alumni			
6	My lecturer/supervisor			
7	Educational agency			
8	Other (please specify _____)			

11 Did you look at other countries before deciding to choose the UK?

- ☐ yes
(go to question 12)

- ☐ no
(go to question 13)

12 Please respond to the following question

To what extent did you look at the following countries before you decided to choose the UK		Not at all	Slightly considered	Greatly considered
		1	2	3
1	The United States			
2	Australia			
3	New Zealand			
4	Canada			
5	Germany			
6	Italy			
7	other (please specify _____)			

13 Please give your responses to the following factors

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following country characteristics influenced your decision to study in the UK		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4	5
Country Characteristics						
1	History of country					
2	Beautiful town, city, country					
3	English culture and arts					
4	Multiculturalism					
5	British sport (such as football)					
6	Safety					
7	Quality of British transport					
8	Cost of living					
9	High image and prestige in Thailand					
10	Ease of going to European countries					
11	Other (please specify _____)					

14 Please give your responses to the following factors

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following higher education characteristics influenced your decision to study in the UK		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4	5
Higher Education Characteristics						
1	Quality of education					
2	University reputation					
3	Recognition of qualification					
4	The length of the course					
5	No GMAT requirement					
6	Tuition fees/cost of study					
7	Variety of courses provided					
8	Quality of facilities for students					
9	Graduate/alumni reputation					
10	Other (please specify _____)					

15 Please respond to the following statement

To what extent do you agree or disagree that these kind of images affected your decision to study at a UK university?		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4	5
1	University image affected your decision to study at a UK university					
2	Faculty/department/school image affected your decision to study at a UK university					
3	University image had a greater effect than faculty/department/school image on your decision to study at a UK university					

16 Have you ever heard of UK university ranking?

☐ yes

(go to question 17)

☐ no

(go to question 18)

17 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements:

Statement		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4	5
1	UK university ranking influences Thai students' decisions to study at a UK university					
2	UK university ranking is the main factor that influences Thai students' decisions to study at a UK university					

18 Please respond to the following question

To what extent do you agree or disagree that you find information on UK university ranking from the following sources?		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4	5
1	WWW/internet					
2	British Council					
3	Private educational agencies					
4	Friends					
5	UK university road shows in Thai high schools/universities					
6	UK graduates/alumni					
7	UK university prospectuses					
8	Other (please specify _____)					

19 Please indicate your responses to the following university ranking factors

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following university image elements are affected by university ranking in general?		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree or Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4	5
1	University status					
2	University reputation					
3	Job prospects					
4	Quality of education					
5	Quality of graduates					
6	Quality of research					
7	Educational facilities					
8	Others					

Marketing Strategies of UK Higher Education

20 Please give your responses to the following factors

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the following marketing materials influenced you before you made the decision to apply to a UK University?		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4	5
1	WWW/internet					
2	British Council					
3	Private educational agencies					
4	Friends					
5	Educational fairs					
6	UK university road shows in Thai high schools/universities					
7	UK graduates/alumni					
8	University prospectuses/brochures					
9	Personal recommendations (such as from Thai lecturers, colleagues)					
10	Other (please specify _____)					

21 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements relating to general marketing issues for UK universities?

Product		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4	5
1	The university offers a variety of courses					
2	The university has a high standard of quality					
3	The course is very concentrated					
4	The course is designed to be in line with the needs of graduates/workplaces					
5	The academic staff have good qualifications					
6	The academic staff communicate well with students and are easy to access					
7	The class size is appropriate					
8	The university focuses on student satisfaction					
9	The university has good facilities					
10	The duration of the course is appropriate					
11	The university is very supportive of students					
12	The tuition fees are reasonable					
13	The tuition is of the same standard as other universities in the UK					
14	The tuition fees are similar to those in other countries					
15	The university is in a good location					
16	The transportation to the university is convenient					
17	The university has a good atmosphere in which to study					
18	The university is in a safe area					
19	The town of my university is beautiful					
20	The university usually promotes itself via an educational fair					
21	The university uses university ranking to promote itself					
22	The university promotes itself via the British Council					
23	The university promotes itself via educational agencies					
24	The university sends staff overseas to promote itself in Thailand					

The Role of Educational Agencies

22 Did you use an educational agency?

☐ yes

(go to question 23)

☐ no

(go to question 25)

23 Please respond to the following statements

The educational agency		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Helped me with general information on UK universities					
2	Helped me with course advice					
3	Helped me with university advice					
4	Gave information on preparing application documents					
5	Helped me with the application process					
6	Helped me follow up on contact with universities					
7	Worked fast					
8	Was very convenient to contact					
9	Advised on alternatives to the IELTS English test					
10	Helped me with visa preparation					

24 Please state your level of overall satisfaction with the educational agency

Very Dissatisfied 1	Dissatisfied 2	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied 3	Satisfied 4	Very satisfied 5

25 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the statement:

“Private educational agencies are an important marketing strategy for UK universities in order to promote, attract and sell themselves to Thai students”

Strongly Disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither Agree nor Disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5

26 For participating in this questionnaire, you will get the chance to win £50 cash.

All respondents will go into a draw and the winner will receive £50 cash.

The winner will be notified by email and telephone.

Please tick in the box to indicate whether or not you would like to enter the draw.

- ☐ **NO. I would not like to enter the draw**
- ☐ **YES. I would like to enter the draw (please your details below)**

Name :

Address:

Email Address:

Telephone number:

Thank you very much for your participation in the survey

**If you have any enquiries, please contact Pimprae Buddhichiwin,
School of Business, Streatham Court, Rennes Drive, Exeter,
EX4 4RJ, Tel + 44 07800652308, Email: pb272@exeter.ac.uk**

Appendix 3: Questionnaire Comment Form

Questionnaire Comment Form

1. How long did it take you to complete the questionnaire? เวลาที่ใช้ในการตอบแบบสอบถาม

2. Please comment on the questionnaire's overall. ท่านมีความคิดเห็นต่อแบบสอบถามอย่างไร

Layout การวางรูปแบบ	Difficult ยาก	Neutral เฉยๆ	Easy ง่าย
Number of questions จำนวนคำถาม	Long ยาว	Short สั้น	Suitable เหมาะสม
Order of questions ลำดับคำถาม	Not good ไม่ดี	Neutral เฉยๆ	Suitable เหมาะสม
Clarity of the questions คำถามมีความเข้าใจ	Difficult ยาก	Neutral เฉยๆ	Suitable เหมาะสม
Vocabulary/wording คำศัพท์ที่ใช้ในคำถาม	Difficult ยาก	Neutral เฉยๆ	Suitable เหมาะสม
Clarity of the instructions มีคำชี้แจงหรือคำอธิบายที่เข้าใจ	Not clear ไม่ชัดเจน	Neutral เฉยๆ	Suitable เหมาะสม

3. Which question was found to be the most difficult to understand? คำถามไหนที่ยากที่สุดสำหรับคุณ

(Please state the question number ข้อที่) _____

(Please state the reason สาเหตุ) _____

4. Did you find any questions that you did not want to answer? มีคำถามไหนที่คุณไม่ต้องการตอบหรือไม่

☐ No ไม่

☐ Yes มี

(Please state the question number(s) ข้อที่) _____

(Please state the reason สาเหตุ) _____

5. Did you find any questions that you feel should be removed? มีคำถามที่ควรจะต้องตัดออกหรือไม่

☐ No ไม่

☐ Yes มี

(Please state the question number(s) ข้อที่) _____

(Please state the reason สาเหตุ) _____

6. Please provide any other suggestions about the questionnaire. กรุณาให้คำแนะนำอื่นๆ สำหรับแบบสอบถาม

Thank you very much ☺ ขอขอบคุณค่ะ

Appendix 4: Consent Letters

1. The letter introducing the research project from the University of Exeter's Business School, issued by Prof. Simon James



27 July 2010

Dear Sir/Madam

Pimprae Buddhichiwin

Pimprae Buddhichiwin is undertaking research for her PhD studies under the supervision of Professor Gareth Shaw and myself at the University of Exeter.

She is currently interviewing distinguished people in Thailand about their experiences and views regarding higher education in the UK and elsewhere and we should be very grateful if you could spare the time for an interview with her.

Yours faithfully

S R James

Simon James

Simon James MSc MA MBA LL.M MEd PhD CTA(Fellow) Associate Professor of Economics
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Stroodham Court
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United Kingdom

Telephone 01392 263204
Telephone (School) 01392 263200
Telephone (University) 01392 263263
e-mail: sjames@ex.ac.uk
Fax (School) 01392 263242

2. The letter of introduction from Suratthani Rajabhat University

ที่ ศร 0561/ 1889



มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏสุราษฎร์ธานี
อำเภอเมืองฯ จังหวัดสุราษฎร์ธานี 84100

9 สิงหาคม 2553

เรื่อง ขอสัมภาษณ์เพื่อเก็บข้อมูลทำคุณูปการ

เรียน

เนื่องด้วย นางสาวพิมพ์แพรว พุทธิชีวิน อาจารย์ประจำคณะวิทยาการจัดการ มหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏสุราษฎร์ธานี ซึ่งได้รับทุนของมหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏสุราษฎร์ธานี ไปศึกษาต่อระดับปริญญาเอก ณ University of Exeter ประเทศอังกฤษ ได้ทำการวิจัยเรื่อง "Marketing UK Higher Education : A case study of the Thai Market" โดยใช่วิธีการเก็บข้อมูลด้วยการสัมภาษณ์ผู้บริหารระดับสูงในมหาวิทยาลัยชั้นนำและผู้นำองค์กรภาครัฐ ภาคเอกชนในประเทศไทย ในประเด็นภาพลักษณ์ และการยอมรับต่อมหาวิทยาลัยในประเทศไทย

ในฐานะที่ท่านเป็นผู้บริหารที่มีประสบการณ์ และเป็นผู้ที่ได้รับการยอมรับอย่างกว้างขวางในแวดวงวิชาการและองค์กรชั้นนำ จึงใคร่ขออนุญาตสัมภาษณ์ท่านเพื่อให้เป็นไปตามวัตถุประสงค์ของการวิจัยดังกล่าว ข้อมูลและความคิดเห็นจากท่าน จะทรงคุณค่าต่อการศึกษาค้นคว้าครั้งนี้อย่างยิ่ง ทั้งจะเป็นประโยชน์ต่อการศึกษาศาสนาโดยรวม

จึงเรียนมาเพื่อขอความอนุเคราะห์สัมภาษณ์ และขอขอบพระคุณเป็นอย่างสูง มา ณ โอกาสนี้

ขอแสดงความนับถือ

(ผู้ช่วยศาสตราจารย์ ดร.พวงค์ พุทธิชีวิน)
อธิการบดีมหาวิทยาลัยราชภัฏสุราษฎร์ธานี

ฝ่ายเลขานุการ สำนักงานอธิการบดี
โทรศัพท์/โทรสาร 077-355618

Appendix 5: Interviews with Executives in Thailand

Section1: Introduction

1. Educational background
2. Work Experience

Section2: Information about UK universities

1. What do you think about your staff studying overseas?
 - What are the advantages?
 - What are the disadvantages?
2. Which British universities have you heard of?
3. - What are your perceptions of British universities?
 - What are your perceptions of UK graduates?
4. - What are your perceptions regarding universities in countries other than the UK?
 - Can you please state if there are any differences between your perceptions of UK graduates and graduates from other countries? (Please give some examples)
5. - If your institute has scholarships for staff who would like to study overseas, do you have any reasons for recommending they study in one country rather than another?
 - Would you recommend the UK?
6. Please give me your views regarding the work carried out by
 - UK graduates
 - Graduates from other countries in comparison to UK graduates
7. Can you name a well-known person who graduated from the UK?
 - What are the images of this person?

Appendix 6: Interviews with Thai Students at University D

Interview questions for Thai students in city D

Section 1: Demographic Information

1. Gender?
2. How old are you?
3. At which level are you studying?
4. In which area are you studying?
5. How do you get financial support?
6. Which part of Thailand you are from?
7. Do you have any full-time work experience?
8. Do you have friends or family studying in or who have graduated from the UK?
9. Are you willing to participate in this research process in the future?

Section 2: Decision Making

1. Why did you decide to study in the UK?
(What is the reason for you making a decision to study in the UK?)
2. Why are you studying at this university?
(What is the reason for you deciding to study in this university?)

Section 3: Students' Expectations of the University

A. Location

1. What is your expectation of the geographic location of the university?

1	2	3	4	5
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2. What is your expectation of the convenience of travel to the university?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

3. What is your expectation of the safety of the university?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

B. Quality of Teaching and Teaching Facilities

1. What is your expectation regarding your lecturers in your classes?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

2. What is your expectation about the quality of teaching support factors such as materials, case studies and teaching style at the university?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

C. Support Staff

1. What is your expectation regarding the quality of service from the support staff at the university?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

D. Library, computers and IT systems

1. What is your expectation regarding the library at the university?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

2. What is your expectation of the computing and IT support facilities at the university?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

E. Accommodation

1. What is your expectation about the quality of the accommodation?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

2. What is your expectation regarding the distance from your accommodation to the teaching buildings?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

F. Social life

1. What is your expectation regarding social life factors such as activities and clubs on the campus?

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

2. What is your expectation about meeting and being friends with British or international students?

1	2	3	4	5
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Section 4: What Will You Get From Your Degree?

1. What is your expectation of life after you graduate?
2. How do you think that your degree might help you in your career?

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